Writers-In-Progress

A

Collection of Essays

by

Basic Writing Students

1993-94

A Publication of:

The Writing Center
Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill, Massachusetts 01830
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Special thanks to Carol T. Barron, Ed.D, Curriculum Coordinator, Basic Writing; David Kelley, Ed.D, Assistant Dean, Division of Instructional Media; all staff and faculty of the Writing Center and Basic Writing; the Student Support Services Project.

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Introduction

As a rule, most students who enroll in a developmental writing course don't like to write; many will freely admit that they hate it. And who can blame them, really? The transfer of thought to paper is occasionally maddening for even the most seasoned of wordsmiths. Students making the transition to college writing from high school have it easier -- they've at least been doing *some* writing. Imagine the challenge for the student who returns to school after ten or fifteen years in the work force, or the frustration for the non-native speaker trying to get a grasp of this crazy English language, or for someone who needs to manage home-family-job while pursuing a degree! Whatever the reason, many students have shifted writing to the bottom of their priority list.

And that, essentially, is why this collection is such a triumph.

Writers-In-Progress represents the best works from students enrolled in EN4400, Basic Writing, for the 1993-94 academic year. During a meeting in late October of the Basic Writing faculty and Writing Center staff, two groups that work both independently and holistically with Basic Writers, we agreed that our students, who spend the semester working through a rigorous and demanding curriculum, were writing some very good pieces and deserved to be recognized for their efforts. Exemplary works by students enrolled in the upper level writing courses, English Composition I and II, are honored at the Composition Awards held at the end of each semester; there is no such forum for the works of Basic Writers. Well, there is now.

We invited students from each section of Basic Writing to submit what they considered their best pieces -- winners would be published in a magazine of their collected works. The response? Over 60 essays were submitted from students of the day or DCE sections at both Haverhill and Lawrence campuses. While this number may seem small in comparison to the hundreds of entries submitted annually to the Composition Awards, it is actually rather remarkable, given the fact that many essays came from students who entered the course with trepidation, and managed, by the end of sixteen weeks, to feel good enough about their work to enter a writing competition.

Contained herein are the works of twenty-five gifted beginning writers, with voices as deep and rich and different as their ages and life situations. It is indeed a pleasure to present their thoughts and words. The publication of Writers-In-Progress serves a two-fold purpose: to recognize the tremendous effort put forth by our students, and to inspire future Basic Writers. The magazine of collected works, which is distributed to the college community at large, has also become an ancillary to the Basic Writing curriculum. We believe that these sample essays, read by students in conjunction with their own writing assignments, will provide hope and a simple message: if they can do it, you can do it.

The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, wrote that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." It has been a privilege to watch these students take their first steps and to see them off on their journeys as writers; it is a long journey, certainly, fraught with struggle to find the right words along the way, but one worth taking nonetheless. We hope that you are encouraged to hit the road as well.

Faith A. Benedetti
The Writing Center

A Meaningful Place:

Students were asked to write a detailed description of a place.

The Mills

by Kevin Harrington

The mills of Lowell were once busy with activity making textiles long before my time. Now the mills are piles of rubble, which stretch long and high across the grounds, due to a great blaze, which also was before my time. The walls of these mills tell a story: they show signs of a great fire many years ago. The rusted color brick is piled high, like newly developing mountains, wooden beams burned to a crisp, a display of scrap metal from pipes throughout the yard, and mounds of ash on top of ash. I'm in awe when I think of what must have happened here, but it does not mean a whole lot to me personally.

When visiting the mills, one must overcome the high fences and ignore "Danger" signs which are all around. But it is easy enough to get inside, because there is a building that is still in use. I chose to scale the ten foot fence, which wrapped itself around the circumference of any possible entrance, to get inside. Beyond the fences and "Keep Out" signs, there are massive piles of ash that were once wooden beams that held up the wooden ceilings and floors. There was brick, and much scrap metal piled high, which seem to touch the clouds. There are a few walls that are still standing. It is bizarre to look at these walls and see where the bathroom mirror still hangs at a slant; to see doorways open up to nowhere but down, and whole floors leaning upright against the wall. Fire escape ladders are bent in half, the walls black from soot, electric wiring dangling there high up on the wall. To see all this can make one feel the agony that the walls must have felt. It's hard to imagine the destruction that must have taken place on that horrid night of the great blaze.

I moved on across the yard and under a "covered bridge", connecting one building to another. The bridge was made of wood, now old and gray with small broken windows and most of the sides and flooring are now just slivers of the pine that once was. From that pine, pigeons swooped down at me to drive me away. I entered one part of the building that did not fall despite all that has happened here, but it too had its share of damage. Here I saw abandoned work stations, where employees were once hard at work, sitting at long benches making textiles, I would assume. I saw where their superiors were at work figuring out calculations; but now that is no more. The desks are on their sides, badly burned and filing cabinets are melted. I can't keep from sympathizing with these people, from wondering what they must have felt as they watched helplessly, as their jobs, and more so their lives, went up in smoke. I see all the damage and I still can feel the roar of the heat through here and wonder how

terrifying it must have been for anyone in the mills that night; the night janitor, if there was one.

Ducking under beams and squeezing my way through the rubble, I went a bit further in. Here I saw beer cans left behind by some earlier visitors to the mills. The window on the other side of the building let some light in, but it still was extremely dark. The room was stuffy, and I could feel the musty air all about me, but more than that there was a feeling which I could not quite comprehend, but maybe will someday, dreadfully. Most of the windows have been boarded up, as in preparation for a storm. I could feel the scrap metal and wood beneath my feet. I could hear the glass cracking underneath me as I proceeded out to where I came in. Coming out of the dark, I could hear the cool breeze rustling through the small trees growing out of the roof of a building; fascinating, how they adapted to the change.

There are three buildings that still stand, one of which is used for some type of business. The others? They're just homes for birds, broken glass and maybe a mouse or two. The rest of the grounds are home to much brick, ash and bent stairwells. The mills of Lowell, once the pillars of the town, are now left and forgotten, by most ... but not by all.

The Unique Spot

by Jill Johnson

As the clean air fills my lungs and the sun's reflection on the water ripples towards me, I watch in fascination. The different sounds and movements keep me captivated. Many years before this special moment, I would go bike riding or jogging by this quiet spot, but never really stopped to observe its beauty. After discovering it, it is like one of those places that only you know where it is and only you seem to be able to open up its hidden secrets. Just a few minutes away from my house, this little section of beauty sits, intriguing to any visitor.

Sitting with my feet dangling over the edge of an unsteady little bridge, I look down into the water at my reflection. A fish clumsily jumps out of the water and my face disappears in the splash he makes when he falls back in. He glides down underneath into the unknown depths and might even decide to pop up like that again later on.

The wind blows lightly over my face, carrying the sound of a persistent bluejay my way. He seems to be claiming his territory and won't let anyone near. The bare trees scratch at each other as the wind pulls and pushes them back and forth. One branch of a tall, strong oak is slowly being bent as two squirrels race up and down it. They squawk viciously at each other, perhaps just having a bit of a lover's quarrel, for several minutes later I see them happily romping around the same tree.

I decided to stay a little longer than usual, hoping to see some extra secrets that perhaps my special place has been holding back from me. Nothing new really happened as the sun descended behind the trees, peeking through the empty forest, sometimes blinding me with its glare. I sat still long enough in one place that so much of the birds activity was back to normal that they kept me entertained, listening to the little chickadees bickering and chatting among themselves.

The distant engines could be heard passing by, but the side road where I sit will not have a car pass by with a destination anywhere near me for several hours. There is only one house down the road, and they never seem to be outside, nor enjoying the loveliness of their view of "my" scenic area.

I stand up and lean against the wood railing, rotting with age, and it sways from my weight. Walking on the deserted road, the dried leaves crunch underneath my feet. I feel as if I am breaking the silence of the quietness that surrounds me. Wild

life scurries around in fear that I may approach too close, yet they do not understand that all I will do is observe them out of pure curiosity and interest.

For the time being, I feel refreshed and energetic enough to go on with everyday life. I think everyone needs to find the solitude in the unique place I found. When nature and its inhabitants see that you mean no harm, they seem to put on a little show for their visitor. I take that as a privilege and an honor, which makes each visit more and more valued. I hope no one else finds my beautiful spot, yet in a way I would want some people to see all the interesting things nature holds back to the common person as compared to an observer.

An Important Person:

Students were asked to create a detailed portrait of a significant person.

My Godfather

by Shaun Durkin

July 28, 1966 was a beautiful Sunday morning. The birds were singing. There was not a cloud in the sky. It was a perfect day for just such a sacred and holy event. I was an infant in a long white silk robe, with everybody watching me. I was just enjoying my moment in the sun. Out of nowhere, a strange man started dropping water on my head for no reason. I didn't know it at the time, but this man would be a major part of the rest of my life.

He enters the room with his head held high, chest out, just proud to be himself. The first thing you notice about him is the dark complexion that gives away his Italian heritage, and the full head of black hair that Father Time has now highlighted with silver streaks that in his younger day must have been as black as coal. As fifty-two years have passed, the strong silent face that we used to look up at has started to droop with time, but still holds many years of wisdom. When he was a young man, he was a champion wrestler and football player at Methuen High School, but now the broad shoulders have fallen a little. There is a belly starting to protrude from his mid-section. The legs are tired, and the knees are scarred from all the operations, but even at this age, you can tell by looking at him that he is very athletic, and probably always will be.

He is a very loving man that would give you the shirt off his back, even if you didn't ask for it. My first totally clear memory of my Godfather Mike was about fifteen years ago. I had just graduated from the eighth grade and was ready to have one of the most relaxing summers of my life. Was I in for a big surprise. He called and asked me if I would come to his house to help him with something. When I got there, he was down in his cellar. As I reached the bottom step, he chuckled as if he had pulled off the coup of the century, and gloated, "I have you and now I am going to get you ready for High School." For the next three months, we lifted weights and ran five days a week. I hated it at the time, but in my freshman year of High School, I started on the varsity football team and it was due in part to the work he made me do that summer.

Family always comes first with him and probably always will. Whenever somebody in the family is in, or is starting to get into trouble, he is always there. When I graduated from High School, I started to gain weight fast. I went from 185 pounds to 240 pounds in a matter of four months. I had always been on the heavy side, but now it was getting out of control. One day he

showed up at my house and spent the next four or five hours talking to me about going on a diet and working out. He said something to me that sounded a little morbid at the time. "You are getting too heavy, and I love you to much to let you gain yourself into a heart attack, and I don't want to be a pallbearer at your funeral."

Looking back now, I know he said it to me to scare me into sticking with it. I wish now I had listened to him then but I was just a stupid kid who thought he knew everything, and I didn't know just how concerned for my well-being he really was.

This loving family man can also be extremely unrelenting and very demanding when you ask for help and then try to get out of what you asked him for help with. When I was about twenty-one years old, I made the mistake of asking him for help, once again to try to lose weight. After about three weeks, I started to get bored with it and I tried to stop working out at the YMCA with him, but the first day that I did skip, he came to my house and with an angry voice, he exploded, "You asked me for help, and you are going to get it whether you like it or not!!!" So until I lost the weight I asked him to help me lose, we were down at the gym five days a week.

He is not only there when people are in trouble: he is also a fun-loving and giving man. Every year he has a cookout on the fourth of July, and invites everybody he knows: family, friends, and friends of friends, never asking anybody to bring or do anything. While you are at the cookout, you hear everybody talking about what a loving and giving person he is. They say things like, "I can't believe Mike has been doing this for so many years," or you might hear, "Nobody else but your Uncle Mike would think of something like this, and do it as well as he does." All day long, he has games for the children and softball and football games for the whole cookout. At night, he has a fireworks display. All he asks for in return is that you have a good time. I know you might think, well, everybody has 4th of July cookouts, but trust me, not like this. He starts early in the morning with breakfast, and the food and games don't stop all day: lobster, steak, lamb, sausage, plus all the usual foods you find at cookouts, never asking for anything more than a thank-you and he doesn't even require that.

He has taught me so much. I don't think he realizes just how much of an influence he has been on my life, almost like a second father. He taught me to believe in myself and not to worry about what other people think, and to help myself before I try to help others. In general, he has taught me to just live life and not try to do too much at once.

One day we were at the YMCA in Lawrence during one of his

many attempts to try to help me lose weight and he asked me in a subtle whisper, "Are you happy, truly happy or are you just happy for appearances, because if you are then that is OK, but if you're not, then you must remember that the only way that you will be happy is to remember that nothing anybody says or does matters. You are the most important person in your life, and if you could only see that and not worry about what everybody else thinks, you will be much better off. Sure everybody would like to see you lose weight, but you are the only person that you need to lose weight for, and the sooner you realize that, the sooner you can get on with your life." He really made me feel good when he said that, better than I have felt in a long time. I should have told him that at the time, but I didn't because I thought that men didn't say those kinds of things to each other.

He has never turned his back on anybody in the family no matter what, whether for advice, physical help, or just a ride somewhere on a Friday night. Now it's time for the rest of the family to be there for him. Awhile ago he got himself mixed up with the wrong people and now he will have to pay for it. If it were any of us, he would do anything he could to help us, but now he is in trouble, so now it's time for us to show him what he really means to this family. I will do anything I can to help him through this.

I want him to know how much he has meant to me over the years and that no matter how rocky our family's future is, I will never stop loving him, and will always be proud to call him my **Godfather, my Uncle Mike.**

Best Friend

by Cheryl Ann Garafolo

It was a clear, breezy late August day when I walked through the North Lawrence Common with a bag of two day old bread that I generously gave the ever-present common pigeons. While resting and watching the fury of the birds pecking at the concrete, I noticed a shadow as I looked up from tying my shoe. The stranger smiled and said, "Hello." I gave him a blatant "Hello" back. How dare he creep up on me like that.

That was my feeling the first time my eyes ever saw Eric. Then I kept bumping into him wherever I went. In the corner drug store. At the Super Market where I did my weekly shopping. Then one day he said to me, "Wish you would let me know when you'll stop following me around. What's the matter -- your husband is always hungry?" That was his way of getting to know if I was available. That conversation was outside Demoulas and is how I really met Eric.

Eric stands about five feet, eight inches tall. He has thick jet black hair that is always combed up and off his brow and he carries a comb in his back pocket of his slacks for an occasional touch up. His eyes remind me of the color of Hershey's chocolate candy kisses. His face is round and sports a trim and neat moustache. His lips are sensually full and when he smiles in that amiable way in which only he can do, he can light up any room. His posture is never slouched and his broad shoulders reflect someone of strength.

Eric's tone of voice is that of a man who is reassuring. Alto in nature, it can be one of a drill Sargent at times or that of a protective and compelling Father.

Eric's hands are those of a man who has soothingly and patiently bathed, powdered and pampered a five day old baby and cozily wrapped him or her into a security blanket, finally satisfied after a feeding of formula and ready for a nap. The same hands that have so gently and lovingly cared for two newborn babies are also the ones that have lifted a heavy couch and moved it from one room to another.

Eric's word is always reliable. There were a couple of times when friends needed his assistance in moving furniture and he was there to help them accomplish this transition from one part of the city to another.

Eric was out of work for awhile. He did not like it and searched earnestly and diligently until he found employment. There were times when the prospects looked dim and he would say "Oh, it's the economy." He always tried looking at a brighter side of a situation. At last he did find another job and although it isn't exactly what he wants for income, he's content with it now and hopes it will lead to something better.

In the evening, you will see him in the kitchen of our two bedroom apartment reading the daily newspaper. He'll look at you with such an inattentively serious manner and his dark brown rimmed reading glasses tipped at his nose then say, "Hey, did you read this?" *Mayor gets his nose caught in elevator.* I'll say, "Really?" and as I try to focus my eyes on the paper to see where I can read this, he'll start to chuckle as if once again he's tricked gullible me.

Eric is neat and very well organized. If I've misplaced something he'll know where it is. He starts an early day during the week. Monday through Friday, sometimes Saturdays, he gets up at 5:30 A.M. and systematically makes himself a lunch, showers and dresses. Then he wakes me up to let me know that he has the children's clothes laid out and ready for them so they can be dressed for day care. He reluctantly says good-bye to his children and walks the fifteen minutes to work in the brisk and sometimes cold morning air to be at work for 7:30 A.M. each day.

He is a proud and dedicated father of a 3 1/2 year old girl and a 2 1/2 year old boy whom he has said are his reason for living. Then there are those challenging moments when he'll say, "Gee, those kids will be the death of me, yet!"

Eric sometimes talks about his life as a child. Although his Father left when he was only six, Eric was brought up in a clean and nurturing home which he shared with two older sisters and an older brother. He talked of his adolescence and how he managed to survive those difficult years. He tries to explain that his Mother was caring but could not reach her rebellious son. Then with a nervous laugh, he tells of the time when he took some money from one of his older sister's pocket books. His sister found out and told him, "You'll have a kid like you, and then you'll see." He wonders to this day why or how his sister could ever know and hopes that it wasn't a curse. He breathes with a heavy sigh of relief that his teen years are not missed but never forgotten.

This past March, before I was admitted to the hospital for a gall bladder operation, Eric attentively cared for me. After the

operation, he would remind me to relax and that he would take care of the meals and the children's needs while I recuperated from my ordeal.

I feel fortunate to have someone such as Eric in my life and I cherish our relationship. He is the Father of our two children, Erica and Keith, and my very best friend and partner in life.

My Uncle-Godfather-Friend

by Christopher M. Gaudet

My Uncle Mark lives on the first floor of the apartment building which I live in and my grandfather owns. That is where I am likely to find him. He is strong but heavily built, and he'll probably be watching television on his couch, sitting in a half slouched position (relaxed) wearing a colored Fruit of the Loom tee shirt, sweatpants, and his glasses. He'll probably be drinking a tall clear glass of Diet Pepsi with lots of ice, which is his favorite drink. In hand, he has a black remote control for the television, "Flicking with the clicker," as he puts it. On his feet will be white socks, no shoes, and possibly he'll be half asleep; he can fall asleep at the drop of a hat.

If I find him asleep he'll definitely be snoring, loudly. Many expressions will come and go upon his reddish, spherical face: some will be funny, some angry, sad, some somber, and some that have no descriptive meaning that I can think of. If awake, he'll smile and ask if I "want to sit down and take a load off my feet," or if I, "want him to get me a glass of something cold to drink."

I think he has always looked the same to me and his face has always been there for me in time of need. The only changes I can recognize are that he periodically grows and shaves his beard and moustache.

He is a unique person in the way that he conducts himself when in public, and at home. At home, no matter where he is, he always looks relaxed. When we go out, he can be a little overwhelming. He is able to take an awkward situation and make it seem funny. From time to time, he can be humorous and comical, but at the same time a little overbearing with his jokes and irritations.

He has a very good disposition toward me and other people but his comical attributes always sneak into his statements. My uncle also has the common street disposition of distrust to people he doesn't know. He doesn't hate them, but he doesn't trust them either.

There have been many times when my siblings and I have fought over ludicrous statements or actions and he said, "I shouldn't hold a grudge against them because", as he always says, "Blood is thicker than Water."

Most people who know him enjoy talking to him because he is

very good at striking up a conversation and even if someone disliked him, or he them, they respected him as a person. Other people tell me he is a remarkable person, but he can sometimes be overwhelming with his comical nit-pickings and irritations, better know as "Zings" or a "Zap." Sometimes they say, "That uncle of yours really can get on your nerves," or "under your skin" or "he can really get your goat sometimes."

They agree with me that my Godfather is a very good person but sometimes he goes a little too far (but then again, occasionally, so do I).

I remember the time we were at a restaurant and a woman sitting across from us was blowing her nose loudly. We looked at one another with disbelief and amazement, that anyone could be so loud while doing that, so he said, "What a schnoz on that one, maybe it's a mating call." He proceeded to return the call with one of his own. We all died laughing.

We have done many things together. A few years ago we bowled together on the same team. It was great -- he would raz me and when he got up to bowl I would raz him, but we never got upset with each other. (Well, almost never.) It was a blessing to have him there for support . Whenever I was doing poorly, he would always say to me, "Come on Chris, spare it up!" or "strike'em out!" or "don't get down." There would have been many times that I would have given up on the game if it hadn't been for him.

Even though we live just an apartment floor away from one another (him on the first and me on the third floor), I sometimes go a few days without seeing him. He never fails to call my house from work in the morning before I take my mother to work. He'll call to talk to my mother. They're very close to one another, and it usually takes a few minutes for her to come to the phone. I'm glad it gives me a chance to talk to him. I must say that I enjoy this because even though he can be an aggravation, I am always glad to see or hear from him because I have never had the opportunity to see him in action at work.

He can be just like a kid at times. I get a vivid picture of him sitting at his over-sized desk looking important and busy doing his work. I can hear him laughing at a joke someone has told him. He is in a office with a few more supervisors and when a "Big Wig," walks in, I hear them all pipe down and at that moment, I get a vision of a child being caught doing something it shouldn't. He'll say to me, out of what sounds to the side of mouth in a half whispered, half scruffy voice "I have to let you go now. Bye." Usually, in about five minutes, he'll call me back to finish talking. When he does this, I can visualize him hanging up the phone in a hurry when his boss walks in and as

soon as the door closes behind this boss, he's back on the phone calling again. I often wonder what he would do if that same boss were to forget something and walk straight back to tell him what he forgot. May God help my Godfather, because that boss will find a little scared puppy with his little tail tucked between his legs waiting to see if he's in much trouble.

I know his company thinks a lot of him because he was promoted rapidly within the company, Koch Inc... They've sent him on many business trips in the past. He has been to Buffalo, New York for business about three to five times by plane. About a year ago, they sent him and a co-worker worker to Yokohama, Japan to oversee the implementation of a new product line Koch was planning on purchasing from a Japanese company.

While he was there, he called me and told me to listen to what I could hear. He placed the telephone against the television and all I could hear was ?#$!*&%$#@!?. It was Japanese and he was laughing and telling me that to him it sounded so funny he had to share it with me.

Every summer for the past three or four, he rents a seasonal camping site in a camping ground in Lee, New Hampshire. He does this for his children and for himself. I end up going with them often, because I have a great time there. I really enjoy it in the woods and he knows this, so that's why he asks me to go with him to help him do something. He also invites me because I get along well with his children. I always try to help him take care of my cousins. I don't mind because Jeffrey is old enough to take care of himself most of the time and Rebecca doesn't give me any trouble at all. Sometimes when we are sitting around the campfire, Jeffrey and Becky and I get a real kick out of watching my Godfather doze in and out of sleep, with a few of those indescribable faces. In the past few years, some of the best times I have had with him have been there at the campground, at the humble camp site in the middle of those magnificent forests of New Hampshire.

At camp as well as anywhere we have been together, he always offers advice to me in a very unique way so as not to put me on the defensive. I can remember many a time that he would stress the fact of how important it was to stay in school and to never quit or give up on anything that I thought was important to me or my beliefs. Specifically, I remember a time when his words meant a lot to me. I was in the ninth grade and feeling depressed about being two years older than everyone else and that my grades were down, I found myself sixteen and a half and in the guidance office prepared to sign the forms that would that would release me from school. No one but my high school counselor and I know about this until now, but at that moment all the words of encouragement and praise from friends and family didn't mean as

much to me as the words that came from him. I'm not sure why, but they did, and at that moment I ripped up all those forms and I said nothing to my counselor. I left his office without saying a word to anyone. That moment of all moments so far changed my attitudes about myself and life in general.

I think in ten years, my uncle will have put his own life back together after his divorce, and I see him enjoying life, with his two children, to its fullest. I think he will have a better understanding of his own feelings and desires as an individual person. It will probably be longer than ten years for him to get remarried, if ever.

I don't think my friend's personality will change dramatically but there will be ever so subtle changes that I'm sure I will not notice, unless I were to see him ten years or so from now.

Over the years he has taught me to be a little selfish because I think I was always taught to be a sharing person, which is good, but sometimes it pays to be selfish.

In my life this Uncle, this Godfather, and this Friend has shown me how to accept myself and others for what they are and has made me realize that without humor, family understanding, and perseverance, life is just sections of a train that whizzes by without your receiving any feedback from it. In a sense, life without essence is not a life worth living.

Abuelin

by Mayra Santana

You could smell the aroma of peppers and onions frying in oil before entering the door. Her thin and fragile figure moves swiftly through her kitchen. Nervously, she stares at the clock; dinner is late and she realizes she is pressed for time. Finally she is able to sit down and smokes her cigarette, while she awaits for her Spanish soap opera to begin.

I remember the first time I met Cede: to get a smile back from her seemed like a big task. Our conversations were limited to yes and no answers. I thought maybe she disapproved of me. "Abuelin" is what my husband Michael calls her; it means Grandma in Spanish. Cede helped his mother with his upbringing. He carries her in his heart like a priest would carry the cross on his chest.

A good eleven years have gone by since we met, and Cede's old and matured appearance still remains the same. After all these years, she still wears the same hairstyle that holds her flimsy gray hair with two bobby pins, one on either side, revealing her large prominent ears and broad forehead. When she smiles, her lips become nothing but a line.

The weight of her eighty years does not seem to matter much to her. She still takes her routine walks to the corner "bodega" or grocery store, with her chin up in the air, taking long steps with such gracefulness. However, it is inconceivably difficult to get her to go anywhere else. Around the house she wears flowered dresses that hang with no waistline, and over it, she wears her blue school girl sweater. She would rather spend most of her time cleaning, mopping and preparing those sumptuous meals that our family always enjoys.

The way she is able to knit her fine detailed tablecloths, with such speed while talking or watching television, always amazes me. She likes to sit on the reclining black chair next to her dining room table. It is there where she recounts her childhood tales in the old country. Most of these stories I have heard more than once, like the one about the rabid donkey who bit her leg after her father told her not to get near it, or the time she was on her way to the store, when a revolutionist threw a gun in her hands and asked her to join in. Laughingly she said, "I guess they needed all the help they could get." The way she uses her hand gestures and facial expressions, the way her voice changes in between when describing another person, brings me right there with her.

I'll never forget the time I was pregnant, desperately craving for chicken stew that only Cede knew how to make. I had told Michael about it, and on that very same day Cede called me on the phone to tell me she had a surprise for me. When I went over to her house, on the table was the big bowl of the chicken stew served with white rice on the side, just like I had imagined it earlier that day. Being sick only meant that she would have a home remedy ready for us to take. Cede would say, "Take these two leaves and boil them in a cup of water for five minutes"...

I had never seen Cede happier than the day she became a U.S. Citizen at age 78. She studied so hard for that test. I remember how her small face lit up when she finally realized she had passed the exam. I had never been more proud of her.

At times, she is quiet, finding pleasure just by listening to everybody else speak. Sitting on the black chair her small head slowly drops to one side and her soft voice becomes faint. Soon after, her brown round eyes will close for her brief daily naps, while her large frame glasses rest on the tip of her straight nose.

Shortly after, you will find her once again in the kitchen brewing some coffee or baking a cake or maybe just tidying up. In any case, my husband is a very lucky man to have a grandmother like Cede. It kind of makes me wish she was my "Abuelin."

An Important Moment:

Students relate, through narrative, a moment of change or insight.

Looking in the Mirror

by Anonymous

One morning, my co-worker woke me up at work and I had no idea where I was. I smelled an awful stench and didn't know what or where it was coming from. My co-worker was shaking me and telling me to get up. She was crying hysterically while trying to wake me. I finally realized that the awful smell was coming from me. I tried to get up, but I began to feel ill. I asked my co-worker why she was crying.

"Look in the mirror," she said.

I tried to get up again. My co-worker helped me to the mirror. I looked and saw my face. I didn't recognize what I saw. My face was covered with cuts and scrapes from my forehead to my chin. My forehead was covered with what looked like flaky rust. My eyebrows were filled with crusty blood. My nose was hidden beneath the dry blood and scabs. My cheeks felt like rough sand paper, for there was no smoothness to be found. My chin looked as though it wasn't there for all the scabs that covered its features. I felt like I was looking at a stranger in my own eyes.

I began to scream. " What the hell happened to me?" I was in a complete state of shock. I had no idea what had happened, and I started to cry. I was feeling the pain from my wounds now. I stared in the mirror some more and noticed my teeth were chipped. I began to cry and scream, not knowing what had happened to me. I was wondering what or who did this to me or when it happened. I didn't know what day it was or what I did the night before or who I was with.

I was very scared at this point and I wanted answers. I didn't know who to ask and I was ashamed to ask anyone or even show my face to anyone. The phone rang and my co-worker answered it.

"It's for you," she said.

I got up and picked it up. It was my friend.

"Are you all right?" he asked me.

He told me we went out drinking the night before and I screamed, "Who the heck did this to me?" He told me to calm down and let him explain, so I did. He said I drank a lot and I was running around the Hampton Beach strip and tripped and fell on my face. He told me he brought me to the gym where I work and left me there to sleep. I started to cry again and asked him to come pick me up.

My friend came and brought me to the hospital. A nurse asked, "What happened to you?"

I started to cry and sadly said, "I don't really know."

The doctor came out and took me into the E.R. and took my

blood. He took it to get tested and came back and told me I was lucky to be alive. The nurses finished cleaning me up and I was released. I went home and tried to recall last night but I couldn't remember a thing.

It finally hit me that I was going nowhere but downhill if I kept drinking. All my life I wanted to be at the top. I was going in the wrong direction. I had to stop drinking.

A close relative talked to me about A.A. and suggested that I attend one of the meetings. I really didn't think I was an alcoholic. I was really nervous about going to the meeting, but a couple of days later I decided to go.

When I entered the room, men and women of all ages were there, talking amongst themselves, drinking coffee. I walked in slowly and cautiously. I didn't know where to sit. I sat in the corner all by myself.

The meeting began and the group of men and women stood up and told their name and stories of their days of hitting bars and their nights in jail. One man stood up and told a story about how he almost killed someone while he was driving drunk. He also explained that he hasn't had a drink in about 25 years. He owes it all to A.A..

I didn't stand to tell my stories. I was really scared about this, so I just listened to everyone else's stories. I felt a little better after that meeting, knowing I wasn't the only one with this disease. I also learned from this meeting that once you're an alcoholic, you always will be -- even if you haven't had a drink for 20 years, you still have the disease in you.

I wrote this hoping any one who reads this understands and realizes that there are many consequences to pay. If you keep drinking or doing drugs, your life will go down a dark lonely trail of mistakes. Look at yourself and what you're doing. Stop drinking or doing drugs, because you're only hurting yourself and others around you.

I haven't had a drink in about ten months. When I look in the mirror now, I feel really good about myself. Every morning when I wake up, I know where I am.

(I wrote this paper to say thank you to my wonderful girlfriend. None of my recovery would have come true without her. Thank you. I love you!)

Delivering My First Calf

by Peter Barnum

It was a cold and rainy day in the month of October 1990. The barn had a cold wet dreary feeling to it. The floors were wet like a hockey rink had just melted away and was left to dry, but it had a long way to go before drying. All the pipes had little rain drops dripping off them and all the windows were fogged up from the heat from the cows previously being in there. The air was very thick and sticky. It was filled with moisture. It was like you were trapped inside of a sweat sock used in a football game.

It was the first time that my brother in law Billy left me alone to take care of the farm. Little did I know that there was a cow due to have a baby -- a first calf heifer, nonetheless. A first calf heifer is a young cow that has never had a baby before and they usually have the hardest time.

The day was like any other day at the farm. I did not find the mother until it was time to get the cows in for milking. When I got them in the barn, I noticed that she was the only one missing from the herd. When I found her, she was in the woods at the other side of the field, hiding in the bushes. I could tell she had already been in labor for a little while, simply because she was standing with her back hunched like someone had put a car jack underneath her belly and was trying to lift her up but her feet were not off the ground yet. Her water bag was hanging out of her, unbroken. It looked like a giant water balloon just waiting to be popped.

I found myself nervous and not knowing what to do. I asked myself, what would Billy do in this situation? Realizing that he was not around to help me in my hour of need, I was on my own for the first time, sad but true. But after I got a hold of myself, I thought of what Billy would do, so I ran all the way back to the barn and got all the things that were needed for an easy delivery. That consisted of a bucket of lukewarm water with some iodine mixed in, a roll of paper towels to keep her clean and also to apply the iodine solution, and a few pieces to pull the calf out with.

When I got back to her I realized that this was not going to be an easy task because the calf was coming out backwards. I thought to myself for a brief moment that the first thing I should do was to try and calm her down as much as I possibly could so that she would not be so stressed out. I began talking to her, telling her that everything was going to be all right.

"Relax, girl. It will be all right. Before you know it, your baby will be out," I said. I thought that I must be going crazy, because I was sitting there talking to a cow. (Wow, I must have been losing my mind). But she did reply to me in a way that you would have had to be to be there to understand. She turned and looked at me with puppy dog eyes like she was aware that something was going wrong.

At that moment, I decided that this calf is going to come out and come out alive, and it was all up to me to make sure that happened. So I started pulling the calf with hay string tied to its back feet, but I was afraid the calf was not going to come out alive. I had to do what my instincts told me to do and that was to push the calf back in and turn it around to the right position. (Believe me, it was not as easy as I made it sound.) It took me along time but I finally did it.

Once the calf was in the right position, I started to pull the calf again. Once again, I found myself talking to her but this time I was saying "Push, girl, push!" At that moment, I found myself in a heavy sweat, but it was a good sweat, because that was the point in which the feet began to show the correct way and I knew it would not be long before the calf was out.

First came the little white front hooves. She had white half way up her legs. Then I began to see a lot of black. Above the black and white legs, a little pink nose showing through. As the face began to reveal itself, I saw that most of her face was black except for a big upside down white triangle between her little dark brown eyes. She looked as if she was crying to get out into the real world and I was the one to make it happen. As I continued to pull, more and more of the calf was revealed. She was all black, like fresh hot tar on a newly paved road, except for the big white area under her belly and a tiny little white dot between her rear hips. She also had white on the tip of her tail, like someone just dipped the tip of her tail and it was still waiting to dry.

After a lot of pulling, the calf was born, but the fun was not over yet, because the calf was not breathing. I had to think of something to make the calf start breathing, so I stuck pieces of grass up its nose to clear its passage. It worked! The calf was breathing but not very well, so I lifted it up upside down to clear the rest of the liquid out of its lungs. The rest of it was up to the mother, so I let her do her thing.

The calf is all grown up now and is milking in the barn next to her mother. She has become one of my favorites in the barn. (You can see why she is one of my favorites.)

This moment is significant because not only did I witness another life coming into this world, but I brought it in all by myself. That moment when the calf was with her mother is when I realized that she was thanking me in her own way just by loving the calf. In all, I realized that I finally did something important on my own for the first time and did it with great success.

BIRTH

by Paul Cain

The birth of my first baby was an experience that I will never forget. The beginning of labor started at home. My wife woke me up at six in the morning. She told me that this was the real thing! (We had several false alarms.) The first thing we did was call the doctor. He said to take our time before coming to the hospital. That was extremely hard to do, because we were very excited.

We both took a shower to calm us down. We got to the Anna Jaques hospital about eight in the morning. It was a cold clear morning, which was good, because it was the first of March and snow was in the forecast.

When we got to the admissions office, they wanted every thing filled out in triplicate. Then they came to their senses. They finally sent us up stairs to the maternity ward. The new name for this part of the hospital is The Seacoast Birth Center. The room we were put in was a holding room. It was the standard hospital room, with the bed and one uncomfortable chair. The walls had a plain look to them. They tried to brighten it up by putting a painting on it. It didn't work: it was still ugly.

After waiting what seemed like an hour, they took us to the new room, which looked a lot better than the other one. When you first walked in, off to the right was a set of double doors that could be swung open in an emergency. It hid the equipment that was not being used, giving the feeling of a room at home. The bed had real wooden headboards. On the other side of the room was a wooden cradle for the new baby. The chair did not receive the same treatment as the room -- it still was uncomfortable. There was also a rocking chair, for rocking the new baby or to rock away the nervous energy of the father before the birth.

At about ten in the morning, the doctor said it was going to be a while. Around twelve, things were rocking and rolling and the contractions were coming steadily stronger. My wife said she wanted to go for a walk. Stupidly, I said "You can't go for a walk."

"I'm going for a walk," she said.

"Just stay in bed," I said, and then she kicked me square in the chest. I will never do that again.

She went for the walk. When she left the room, the nurse said "Don't worry about it. They all get very emotional and some get physical at times."

About one in the afternoon, my wife wanted something for the pain. After the doctor checked her, he said she had time for a shot. By the time the nurse gave her the shot, the doctor was already in the cafeteria having his lunch.

About ten minutes later, my wife was relaxed enough that the baby made his first brief appearance. This set off a frenzy of action. The doctor was called away from his lunch in a hurry. The nurse almost had to deliver the baby! The doctor came running in just in time. When he came into the room, he was yelling at the nurse to find his gloves. The nurse had used the gloves before he came in. When he finally got the gloves on, he went to work.

The baby was on his way out. I was so excited about seeing my first born child! As the baby started to crown, my stomach started to flip-flop from the anticipation. I was telling my wife it was almost time and it would be over soon. She was telling the nurse to help her, because she was scared. The nurse told her she was doing well and to keep breathing through the contractions.

As she would breathe through the next contraction, I encouraged her, telling her the contraction was almost over. I would say "Just breath through it, just a little longer, it's almost over, try and relax now."

"I'm trying but it hurts too much," she said.

"It won't hurt much longer because the baby's almost here," I said.

All the while, we were watching the monitor. The monitor was showing the contractions and the baby's heart rate. As the waves of contractions would sweep over my wife, the baby's heart rate would climb, then would go back down during the next rest in contractions. Then it would repeat itself. You could tell it was just as tiring for the baby as it was for my wife. To help, I wiped her forehead with a cold cloth. I held her hand and told her how beautiful the baby was going to be.

The baby came out with one last push. My attention shifted to the other end of the bed. At this time the doctor was there helping the baby. As the baby started to come out, my wife said "I can feel the baby coming out. Can you see him yet?"

"I can see his hair -- he has a lot of it. It must have been all the heartburn you had," I said. That got a short laugh from my wife.

As the baby's head came out, the doctor had to yell at my wife to stop pushing. The rest of the baby came out quickly. I saw it was the boy we were told we were having. I was so happy that I could not stop trembling. He was so tiny, but he was very active. He had his first test of his life. It was an easy test for him -- all he had to do was be a baby. The test just rated him on his activeness and skin color. He passed with flying colors.

The doctor asked me if I wanted to cut the umbilical cord. My hands were still trembling and I had a hard time cutting the cord, but it felt great to set my son free and hold him for the first time. By now, I was almost useless because I felt like I was walking on clouds.

After the nurse finished taking his foot prints and giving him his first bath, which were just a few of the lifetime of first adventures for him, we finally got time to just sit and hold the little bundle of a baby.

We decided to name him Christopher Paul; the first name because I liked it, and the second because my wife wanted him to have my first name.

My wife wanted to tell her grandmother about the baby. So she got out of bed and walked down the hall to her grandmother's shock and surprise. Her mother could not believe that she was up and walking only forty-five minutes after Christopher was born.

The nurses were so helpful and compassionate. They held my wife's hand during the hardest parts of the birth, telling her how great she was doing. They also helped me to stay calm. That also kept her a little calmer. Although the doctor was not our first choice of the six doctors in the practice, they were all terrific.

After the baby was born, the nurses even came in to give my wife little tidbits of gossip. It was non-personal information about what was happening in the rooms down the hall. I don't think my wife could survive without some gossip.

For the next day or two, we had countless friends and relatives come in and tell us how cute Chris was. I was so happy to finally be able to pass out the cigars to all my friends.

Even after eight years, I can still remember all the feelings that happened that day. Since then I have had three more children. It did not lose any excitement cutting the umbilical cord of each. They all had different events leading up to the birth of each child, but they were all happy days. Now we feel sad that we won't be going through the process again.

Brother

by Tara Di Pietro

It was a cool spring day in 1985. Andy was 12, I was 11, and Joey was 5 years old. The birds were chirping happily, and the sun was like the brightest lemon anyone had ever seen. Andy, Joey and I were outside playing in the circle. Andy was shooting hoops, and Joey and I were riding our bikes playing "curves and cues."

After about an hour and a half of outdoor playing, a dump truck with a rather large trailer behind it came flying up over the hill and into the circle to turn around. We had to move to the side so we wouldn't get hit. When the truck turned our way, I realized I knew the driver and quickly shouted, "Hi John!"

John was a good friend of the family's and was employed by my Uncle Lenny. He waved back with a smile on his face. I couldn't see the passenger because the truck was just so high for an 11 year old, but I took a pretty good guess as to whom was riding in that seat. It was Greg.

Greg and John were cousins. They had come up to my house to mow the lawn. Andy had gone into the house when they had arrived. Joey and I stayed outside, because we were fascinated by these extra large mowers steered by these two rugged teenagers. We were amazed at how skilled they were to keep a straight line, ranging from a field half a football field around to the back of the house and back out to the front of the yard.

When they were finished, they each asked for a glass of water. I went into the house and Joey stayed with them on the porch steps, inquiring more about them, because they were so much older than he, hoping that he could learn something from them. When I returned to the steps where I had last seen them talking, they were gone.

Then I heard a grinding noise of a engine not too far away and knew it had to have been them giving Joey a ride down to the bottom of Gale Ave. and back up to the circle down to the front of our house. Joey loved trucks and tractors, and more or less anything that made the noise "VROOM, VROOM."

When they returned, they all got out of the truck except for Joey. He stayed behind, playing in the mulch they had in the back of the truck, while John and Greg drank their water like they had been in the desert for a year, because they were going to be late for another job.

Meanwhile, I was trying to get Joey out of the truck that he didn't belong in, in the first place. He started to stand up as John and Greg walked by and opened the doors to the truck's cab, saying, "Hurry up, Joey, we ain't got all day, ya know!"

I heard the grinding noise of the truck again and got really scared, because Joey wasn't even close to being out of the truck. I turned my back when I thought Joey was safe and started to walk up the field in the direction of the house, when I then heard the clicking noise of the truck going into drive.

I knew something was wrong, because I hadn't heard Joey yell, "Tara, wait up!"

I turned with fear in my eyes hoping that Joey had gotten off safely. But he didn't. He was hanging on to the tailgate, feet on the fender. When the truck jolted his little body from the excessive weight and push on the gas pedal, Joey fell off. I couldn't even scream. I was so concerned as to what could happen to him. As John kept driving, I saw Joey hit the ground, face down, making a rather loud thud. Then I watched the 1500 lbs. trailer ride right over him as if he were part of the pavement. I screamed, "John, stop, stop John stop!"

I didn't even assist my ailing brother, as John got out of the truck not knowing what happened.

I knew what had happened and I loved him so much I didn't want to see the pain, the hurt, the fear in his eyes that might not even be there.

I ran, like a screaming ambulance to a dying person, into my house where I saw my parents looking at new floor tile for the kitchen. When they looked up at me, I must have had fear in my eyes, because my dad and mom both ran out of the house and darted toward all the commotion. I abruptly said, "Joey was just run over!" My dad ran faster down the field. My mother and I accompanied him as he screamed, "No, No, No" furiously. With fear in his eyes, he picked up the limp body of Joey ever so fragile, as if he were defusing a bomb, and carried him into the house before bringing him to the hospital.

I sat on the porch waiting for their return. They arrived several hours later. I didn't know what to expect or think because I didn't see Joey in the car. As they pulled in the garage, I ran up to the car and then a moment of relief shot through my body when I saw crippled Joey in two braces covering his entire undeveloped baby legs that only knew how to run, jump,play and have fun. Instead, that year, Joey had to be taught how to steer a wheel chair.

Joey has had to work hard to regain full use of his knees. He will never have a full recovery because there will always be slight pain. To this day, I often wonder while I watch him playing hockey, or running the bases after a huge hit to the outfield during a baseball game, or my favorite, running from his older sister Tara who is ready to kill him because of his excessive childish aggravation.

I realize now that he might not be here today or he might be crippled, but no matter what type of a "little shit" brother he can be, I love him infinitely.

LUCKY, THE ALBINO HAMSTER

by Mary Hogan

I remember the day my girls, Crystal and Katelynn, returned home from their father's house. They had smiles that stretched from ear to ear and held in their hands a box. They boasted with excitement and joy, eager to tell me what they had. It was an Albino Hamster. She was named "Lucky." Lucky was pure white, with pink glassy eyes, and a nose that twitched from side to side.

I knew I had to get used to this hamster if it was going to occupy space at our home. One glance at this hamster, reminded me of the mice that had joined our home "uninvited" one year. It was horrible setting up mouse traps, and even more upsetting, was hearing the snapping sound of the springs going off.

We loved holding Lucky in our hands, but capturing her was a different story. We would hold a crispy carrot in her cage (that was her favorite treat), and when she would creep close enough to the cage, we would gently pick her up. Lucky had taught us right from the start that if you were going to hold her, she needed something to nibble on. Hamsters have extremely sharp teeth and can be frightened easily. To defend themselves, they use their teeth and bite what ever happens to be in sight, including little fingers.

Every morning, Crystal and Katelynn would tap on her cage, saying "Good Morning, Lucky." Her eyes would open in a flash as she dashed to the other side of her cage, and the girls would laugh and say, "See you after school."

It's a lot of work taking care of any animal and Lucky was no exception. Once a week her cage was cleaned and a fresh supply of water and food were added. This job had been passed on to me.

I started becoming attached to Lucky. After all, she had been living with us for six months, and was now considered a part of our family.

I enjoyed browsing in the pet store, observing items they had for hamsters. Then, one day I noticed a package labeled "SHED A BED." The directions read, "Simply place a pad in a cage and an animal will shred it into a clean, fluffy nest. It satisfies an animal's natural gnawing instinct. Replace once a week." It sounded great, with one exception: it was marked $4 per package. I liked the idea of a warm, fluffy nest bed for Lucky; after all, the weather was still quite chilly.

I proceded to another store and checked out their prices on pet supplies. I passed by an aisle of craft supplies. Wow, I thought to myself, I can purchase batting fiber, which is usually used for stuffing pillows. It was similar to the "SHRED A BED" product, and much cheaper.

That night, I changed Lucky's cage and put in the new batting fiber from the department store. She seemed to head straight for it, and knew exactly what to do with it. She stuffed it up in her tiny little hands into a ball and kept rolling it until it was just right for her bed. It was quite amusing to watch.

Early the next morning, just before the girls were due to awake, I looked over and took a peek at Lucky's cage. She was quiet and still. Just then, the girls awoke and were busy getting ready for school. Moments later, I heard Katelynn tapping loudly on the hamster's cage.

"Katelynn, don't hit the cage so loud. You'll scare the hamster," I said.

"But Mommy," Katelynn insisted, "Lucky won't go to the other side of her cage, and I want her to."

"Well, maybe she's just being a lazy hamster today and prefers to sleep in late," I answered, still trying to ignore her persistent tapping on the cage.

"Bye, Lucky," Crystal replied. "I'll see you when I get home from school," and she was off.

Time had passed when Katelynn dashed into my room, showing me her new trick she had learned from Lucky.

"I have a question," she said. "My arms hurt when I do my trick." Katelynn displayed her trick, laying on my bedroom floor, with both arms and legs stretching straight up to the ceiling. A lump stuck in my throat, as I tried to swallow. This trick needed to be investigated quickly. I was frightened as to what I might view.

Crystal loved this hamster. I remember the day I had to tell her that her Great Grandmother had passed away. She screamed a pitch that has never left my ear. I can't tell her I thought, entering into the room where the cage stood.

Sure enough, Katelynn displayed Lucky's pose precisely. I picked up the hamster who laid limp in my palm. Placing my ear to her side hoping to feel a breath, I could feel the lump growing in my throat, making it difficult to express any sound, as I tried sending Katelynn out of the room.

The realization had set in. The hamster was dead? But how, I thought. She seemed fine last night. Getting angrier, "I even bought you something to make a fluffy bed to keep you warm," I

said. I remained quiet for a few moments, trying to decide what to do, and if I should tell the girls, especially Crystal, who was at the difficult age of eight.

My decision was made. I won't tell them, I thought. I dashed into the kitchen to find the phone book, searching the "PETS FOR SALE" listings. There seemed to be hundreds. I starting dialing every number I had seen, sparing no distance. I phoned several pet stores but no one seem to have an Albino Hamster. "How about anything close to it?" I asked. The sales man offered to save a tan hamster for me."It could be passed off as a hamster who is a little dirty," he replied.

I purchased that hamster, the closest one I could find that resembled Lucky. Yes, it was light tan in color, but it did have the same little nose that twitched from side to side.

I cleaned the cage for our new hamster, being sure not to spread any germs which may have caused Lucky's death.

As I placed the hamster in the cage, there was no doubt about it. Even my four year old daughter Katelynn would know it wasn't white. When I placed the new hamster in the cage, I felt the warm sun on my back. Hey, I thought, I can rearrange the room and place the hamster near the bay window in order to disguise its true color and identity.

It was two o'clock when Crystal arrived home, and as usual, she ran to Lucky's cage saying "Hi." She didn't notice anything: I was in luck.

Katelynn arrived moments later, telling Crystal about the day she had with Mommy. She was about to lay on the floor, trying to show her sister the new trick Lucky had taught her, when I interrupted her with a cherry flavored lollipop.

"Do you like the way I changed your room around?" I asked.

"Yeah," Crystal replied softly. "Mom," she said, "how come Lucky looks brown?"

"Brown?" I repeated. I hesitated. "Maybe she's getting a tan just like you had last summer." Just then, the hamster ran to the other side of the cage and when I looked at Lucky #2, I noticed that she was not a girl. I was sure that it would only be a matter of days before I heard more new questions about Lucky #2's appearance.

Furthering my investigation on how Lucky #1 died, I discovered that it was due to the batting fabric, which had caused Lucky to suffocate, due to the fibers in the batting.

I guess cheaper is not always better and telling the truth is easier than a lie.

Tracy's Walk in the Rain

by Rhonda Martin

It was a warm, summer's day, with a light sprinkle of rain. The date was June 5, 1974. There were only three weeks left until summer vacation and I couldn't wait for school to be out. As I was sitting in class, waiting for the last bell of the day to ring, I was so excited. My best friend, Tracy, was going to have a birthday in just two days. When the bell finally rang, I jumped out of my seat, grabbed my books and ran out the door to wait for her.

When Tracy finally got out of class, (ten minutes late for being the class clown, which wasn't unusual) we started walking home. Tracy is a small, skinny girl with hair as black as the night-time sky. Her big brown eyes have the slightest hint of green to them. The tiny freckles on her face make her smile even brighter. She had more energy then anyone I knew.

Since it was sprinkling outside, there were puddles on the ground. And, of course, being kids, one of our favorite things to do was splash each other. So we started jumping in the puddles and getting each other wet. My feet were so wet, it felt like the puddles were in my sneakers.

When Tracy told me she knew what she was getting for her birthday, I couldn't believe it.

"How do you know that?" I asked her.

She told me about sneaking into her mother's bedroom closet and seeing her new bike.

"You're such a sneak. I could never do such a thing," I told her. Tracy was always sneaking around, and getting into trouble. She loved to live life on the edge. I never met anyone so full of life and mischief.

When we got near Bob's Variety, Tracy talked me into going in the store with her to buy some candy. I didn't like going in there. Bob was such a mean and nasty old man. I didn't like him. It was almost a ritual for all the kids in the neighborhood to give him a hard time because he was so mean. He took great pride in his store windows, and would stack the Pampers in a neat triangle. So, on the way out of the store, Tracy smacked the Pampers and they all came tumbling down. When Bob came screaming at us, we ran out of the store, up the hill and all the way to the railroad tracks, laughing the whole time.

We decided to follow the train tracks up to Central Street and pick up the road again there. As we were walking, I started

telling her about my weekend with my father.

"I don't know why I go to my father's house, all he does is sit in his chair and yell at every one," I told her.

"You love him and would miss him a lot if you didn't go," she said to me.

"I guess you're right. Maybe I would miss him a little," I replied.

Before long, I noticed that we had gotten to Central Street. I stopped for a moment to bend down and tie my sneaker, when, all of a sudden, I saw a big, black car with one red door speeding down the street. I started screaming to Tracy, who had just stepped off the sidewalk without noticing the approaching car.

"Tracyyyyy... watch out!"

Then I realized that the car was about to hit her. The next thing I remember is hearing the skidding of the car's tires on the wet pavement and seeing Tracy being thrown to the ground. My mind was in a state of panic; I didn't know what to do. When I finally reached her, I could not tell exactly where she was hurt. All I knew was that there was blood coming from so many different places. She looked so tiny, even tinier than she really was. I kept calling her name, "Tracy, Tracy!" I couldn't understand why she wouldn't answer me.

I don't know how long it took, but Tracy's mom and the ambulance showed up at about the same time. The attendants from the ambulance began to examine my friend as a crowd gathered. I did not realize, until a police officer asked if I was hurt, just how much blood I had gotten on myself by kneeling down and holding on to Tracy. "No, I'm fine," was my response to the officer.

"Did you see what happened?" asked the uniformed man.

"Yes. My friend Tracy and I were walking home from school together when this happened," I said. "I stopped to tie my sneaker when I noticed this car speeding down the road." It was then I realized that the officer was not the only one listening to my story. Tracy's mom could hear every word I was saying as she cried and watched the ambulance attendants strap her daughter onto the stretcher.

The driver of the car turned out to be a local teenager on his way home from school. Another man had seen the accident and told the officer almost the same story I had. It felt good to hear that I was not the only one to say that he was speeding. After they put Tracy in the ambulance for the short drive to the hospital, I started walking home. All I did was cry the rest of the way. I didn't know if my best friend was going to be all right. For that matter, I wasn't sure that I was going to be all right.

Tracy was in a coma for about a week. Although she was

unable to respond in any way, I went to see her almost every day after school. She looked so helpless just lying there. Her right leg had been broken in three different places and she received a lot of cuts and scrapes from hitting the ground so hard.

One day, as I was walking down the hall towards her room, I could hear a familiar voice. "Mom, I'm hungry. The food here tastes terrible. I just want to go home!" I knew right away that it was Tracy's voice. I was so surprised to see that she was sitting up talking. My heart started pounding, and my hands started shaking. No one told me she had woken up. A few days later, she came home from the hospital. We were then able to have her birthday party. It would be a while before she was able to take her first ride on her new bike, but she and I, along with her family, were grateful that she was alive. Since then, she's been fine. But I, on the other hand, can still recall the vivid memory of almost losing my best friend.

D.O.A.

by Craig Lambert

I was working on the paramedic truck with my friend Paul, who I have known for years. We were leaving Dunkin' Donuts and I couldn't have been happier. I was having my coffee (regular and two sugars) and a blueberry muffin (freshly baked and still warm), savoring every sip and every bite. It had been a nice day to this point (especially since I had my coffee). The sun was shining, giving the day a pleasant warmth. I could feel the warmth of the sun on the right side of my face as it shone through the window of the truck.

"Paul I love this -- my coffee and a beautiful day. What more could I ask for?"

"A blonde and more money," he replied as he changed the radio station.

"You`re not going to listen to this, are you?" I asked.

"Yeh, I like this song. What's wrong with my music?"

Then, like the clouds began to spoil my sun, three tones over the 911 radio spoiled my breakfast. As Paul turned down the stereo (thank god) I listened to the call; it came in as a suicide. We hit the lights and sirens and this breakfast was definitely over.

We pulled up to a small blue home, and on arriving at the scene, an eerie feeling came over me. We were greeted by a police officer standing in the driveway, waving his hands as if to say it's too late, slow down. Sticking his head though the open window of the driver's side, he said "Hey, you guys. I think we're a little too late for her. Don't kill yourselves," smirking at the pun he had just made.

I put on my white rubber gloves and stepped from the truck. I knew that it in fact was too late. No one was rushing around or moving too fast; I know this is not a good sign on a suicide call. In life-pending emergencies, people are panicking, and yelling, "Hey over here, hurry up! " This was not the case.

I grabbed our monitor and as I walked from the truck, I felt like someone or something was watching all of us there. The sun had disappeared behind the clouds, and without its warmth, this feeling was even more intense.

"Craig, just grab the monitor."

"I got it already."

The monitor is a machine we use to shock a person's heart if it has stopped. It also tells us what type of condition the heart is in. By placing two patches on a person's bare chest and hooking wires from the machine to these patches, we can read the

heart's rhythm.

I walked up the driveway to the garage where one officer was leading us. I could begin to smell the carbon dioxide.

"We found her here about ten minutes ago. We had to break through the door. I think she's been here a while."

As I walked closer to the garage, I could feel death all around. It felt like a pressure exerting on my body, and on everything here. It made me feel uneasy and uncomfortable, like something was wrong and very eerie. I looked back down the driveway, at the lights on our truck still flashing, at the three police cars and officers all around. One of the officers was getting a roll of yellow police tape from his car, the classic sign that a death has occurred. As I walked, I listened to the garbled voice of the dispatcher on the radios. I walked past a small black and brown dog, maybe a foot tall, with his long fur dragging on the ground. It was apparently the owner's dog. Police officers must have entered in the house and left the door open, and the dog wandered out of the house. He looked so confused and so unhappy. As I walked past this dog, it gave me the sense that it knew it was now alone.

A call like this gives you a feeling that makes you feel so insignificant. You feel that something much bigger is watching you, like the person's spirit is above you, looking down on everything happening. This was an extremely strange call for me, because as I kept walking I felt like I was looking down at myself through the eyes of the other person's spirit. For a moment, somewhere in my mind I could view everything. I could see the whole yard, Paul, myself, even the gray shingles of the roof, but I was still following the cracks between the pebbles of her driveway. I could feel it through my whole body: a feeling of incompleteness, that something was gone forever, that something was missing.

We entered the garage and I began to get a headache from the still-lingering fumes. I slid along side of the car, a large dark blue new Buick that left hardly any room to get the doors open. After placing the monitor on the roof I looked in the car. A white female, apparently in her early forties, slouched back in the seat with her head on her left shoulder. She was as white as a ghost, with the middle of her cheeks dark blue. She wore a white shirt with big black buttons and black nylon slacks. Because of suffocation by carbon dioxide, she had drooled on her shirt. This caught my attention because it smelled strong like the carbon dioxide itself, and because she was still wet in a pretty sizeable area of her shirt covering about seven inches round. She wore a black pendant with a silver border. It hung from her neck by black beads that had no apparent end.

" Well, it looks like she did it right," I said. "How did you guys know she was here? Who reported it?"

"Her therapist called the station."
"So much for therapists," said another officer.

Paul hooked the pads of the monitor to her chest, and as he did, I placed the back of my hand to her face. Even with the white rubber gloves on, the coldness of her dead body sent a chill right through me.
"Nothing," Paul said.

Behind the car, I saw the white hose of her vacuum. The hose ran from the tailpipe along the side of the car in through the rear window. She had rolled the window up as high as it could go until there was just an even space from which the vacuum-hose entered the car. She had even filled this space by placing towels in it, neatly rolled yellow towels. She was precise even in executing her perfect suicide. I walked up the steps and into her home, and I stood looking around her as kitchen. I saw a pile of papers on a brown wooden table. I assumed it was her kitchen table, but it was too cluttered to eat on. This disorganized pile of paper could have symbolized how disorganized her life was becoming and how she couldn't get it together. I began to think about how she began all this, possibly sitting inside here, thinking of it.
"Yeh, she took a shower," one officer said.
"Hey Paul, what's this shower stuff?" I asked.
"It's when women kill themselves -- they'll take a shower first. They're vain, and they want to be found clean."
I must have revealed in my expression I was still in deep thought. I was still locked into the question: why?
"Hey, Craig, don't think about it. Let's split. The coffee's getting cold."
"Yeh, we're done. Let's get out of here".

As we walked down the stairs and made our way down the driveway, several cops gave us half waves. One of them was lifting the yellow police tape. As I crouched under it, I read off the words silently to myself -- POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS. It was official and impersonal. That's what the words meant to me. It was just the whole scene. I kept thinking to myself that it was such a stupid waste of a life. On the way back to the hospital, Paul had been right -- my coffee was cold. It had become part of the now cold day, a reminder for the next two hours. I still kept thinking of this lady, about what could have gone so wrong in her life, and about how she calculated her own death. It's a tough part of the job, trying to save people's lives who want to live so bad, but don't make it. Then I think about the people who want to die so bad because of their lives. It becomes hard to rationalize, even though I work around it every day.

It still hasn't made any sense to me yet.

All for a 25 Cent Pack of Gum

by Sheri Martino

I was only eleven years old. One might think I was still a child, so I didn't know any better. The fact is I did. Mother always instilled in us what was right and wrong, and so I really have no excuse. Needless to say, I did it anyway. I betrayed myself in a sense because of my friends (or so I thought at the time).

It all started with peer pressure from Raquel and Amy. These two were very manipulative. Now that I think back, they could talk just about anyone into anything. They would stalk you and taunt you until you did what they wanted, and I was their prey for that particular day.

I was walking through the mall when I heard a yell.

"Hey, Sheri, is that you?" As I turned, there behind me were Amy and Raquel.

"What are you doing in the mall all by yourself?" Raquel said.

"Just looking around."

"Well, let's look together," they said, and so off we went. As we approached the CVS store, they stopped.

"Why did you stop?" I said.

Raquel and Amy were whispering. As they looked at me, Raquel said, "You don't belong to a gang yet, do you Sheri?"

"No," I said, "but who cares?"

"Why of course you do," said Amy, "Everyone who's anyone belongs to the gang."

"Oh yes, that's true" Raquel uttered. "You can belong to ours! All you have to do to get accepted is to go into CVS and steal a pack of gum and we will witness it."

"What are you two, nuts?" I'll get caught," I sputtered.

"No, no you won't," came from Raquel's mouth. "We did it, and didn't get caught, did we Amy?" Amy nodded. "We belong to the gang. It's simple -- just go in and steal a pack of gum. It's small enough to fit right in the palm of your hand."

"No, I can't do that. My mother will kill me," I said.

"She'll never know," Amy said. "We won't tell, and besides that, if you don't do it, we will tell the rest of the gang you were chicken and you will never belong to a gang. You'll just be a loner the rest of your life."

Just then, the two of them started to chant "Chicken, Chicken." With that, I agreed to steal the gum. At the time, I knew it was wrong, but it was something I just had to do to be accepted. I didn't want to be a loner the rest of my life. I had a lot of my life left!

As I walked into the store my mind was racing, my knees started to knock together, and my heart pounded so hard I could hear it myself. My mind told me, my God if I could hear it perhaps the manager could hear it too. Perspiration beaded up on my forehead. I looked over my shoulder to see if Raquel and Amy were watching. If they weren't, perhaps I could buy the gum and tell them I stole it. They were watching, so reluctantly, I continued down the aisle where the gum was displayed. I was on a mission to steal gum.

The shelves were stacked high and I felt like I was in a cartoon, where all the labels came alive and were looking at me with accusations. They knew I was going to steal the gum. I continued on, one foot in front of the other, and slowly I closed in on the gum. As I reached the gum rack, I stood there, just shifting my weight back and forth. My stomach fluttered like there were a thousand butterflies in it. Is anyone looking? Of course. Raquel and Amy are. From the window, they motioned with their hands and mouth for me to hurry up. Before I knew what happened, my small shaking hand reached up and grabbed a pack of gum. I didn't even realize what kind of gum I had, but at this time it didn't matter. It was in my hand and straight into my pocket. I turned quickly and scurried back up the aisle and out the front door. Raquel, with a big smile that lit up her face and Amy, with punkish delight, screamed with joy as we ran down the mall.

Boy, what a relief! I didn't get caught, was my only thought.

"You did well," Raquel said

"We'll tell the gang," was Amy's comment, as they took the gum and ran off, leaving me standing there all alone feeling guilty.

After that morning with my friends, I went straight home and to my room. The fact that I had stolen something made me feel so low and ashamed, I couldn't even look at myself in the mirror. I was now a thief, disgusted with myself for letting Raquel and Amy talk me into stealing. I couldn't rid the guilt from my mind. I took several showers in order to cleanse myself of what I had done. This, of course, did not work. I knew it was wrong morally because of what my mother told us of right and wrong. I began thinking to great extent about what I was going to do to make things right. I came to some questions: Should I tell my mother in fear of disappointing her? Should I let her find out on her own? Should I go back to the store and tell the manager I stole the gum? Of course, my mother would find out that I did that. I assumed that no way was going to be easy.

After contemplating these questions, I came to the only conclusion I could: I needed to tell someone. Perhaps if I did tell my mother, she would punish me and things would be okay.

I could accept what punishment she gave, knowing I really deserved it. I was, of course, guilty. The thought of telling her made me shiver and sick to my stomach. The fear of the unknown, and being totally honest was hard, especially knowing I was going to disappoint my mother.

I walked into the kitchen where my mother stood preparing supper. As I spoke my voice cracked, "Mom, we need to talk."

"Yes, what is it dear, I'm kind of busy," she said.

"But, Mom, it's important. Please," I said.

As she turned, my heart fell to my feet, my mouth went dry, and my words were soft. "Mom," I began, "I did something I'm not very proud of."

"Well, speak up, Sheri, what is it?" she said sternly. As tears trickled down my cheeks, I confessed to stealing the gum. The look on her face was undescribable. I could tell she was disappointed in me, but she never raised her voice. She explained I would have to make it right.

"But how, Mom?" I replied.

She said, "We will go together back to CVS and you will have to tell the manager what you've done." I would then have to pay for the 25 cent pack of gum.

I learned a valuable lesson that day about honesty. I never stole another thing. I should've of stood up for my own values that day because I ended up alone anyway. We all must adapt and overcome, but not for a 25 cent pack of gum.

Miracles Happen

by Catherine L. Mendieta

It was a hot and sticky day in the early month of June 1992. Everyone's air conditioning was running and the fans were blowing back the humid air. The children in the next yard were splashing and swimming in their tiny tot pool, with their parents overlooking, drinking lemonade with their clothes clinging to them.

My work schedule was very slow at the present time. I was making ends meet to get by and having a tough time, until I received a telephone call from the hospital.

"Cathy, do you mind filling in for me for the rest of the evening? I have an important meeting to attend for my other job. If you can't make it, I completely understand. But I'll tell you one thing, the hospital today isn't all that very busy. I've done my rounds and don't think there will be any other patients for tonight," said Monica, one of the cardiogram technicians.

"Okay! I have nothing to lose. At least I'll be able to enjoy the cool atmosphere in the office. I should be there within the next half hour," I responded.

Strolling into the Cardio-Tech's office, I signed in for the eight-hour shift. Settling myself down into the brown cushioned chair, I took in a big deep breath and exhaled when suddenly my beeper went off and said, "Code 99 Emergency Room, Code 99 Emergency Room, STAT!" I promptly sprung out of the chair and being five months pregnant, I hobbled down the empty hallways quickly. I got to the Emergency Room in under one minute.

Entering the room, I saw the patient whom I was paged to assist. An elderly person lay on the stretcher impotently. At first I did not recognize him, since he had two tubes coming from his mouth: one for oxygen and the other for suction. His complexion was pale and face rigid, as if a ghost had appeared to him. When I took a second look at him, he looked more and more like my Uncle Tom. "No! This can't be him!" I whispered. I went over to the nurse to inquire what the patient's name was.

"His name is Thomas Rattcliff," she responded.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"I'm quite sure. Mrs. Rattcliff is in the waiting area," the nurse replied.

"He's my uncle!" I said. Stroking Uncle Tom's face I asked, "Can you hear me, Uncle? I'm your niece, Catherine. Remember me?"

"No," the doctor replied. "He doesn't know a thing of what is going on. He's unconscious. We have no record of his heart condition. So far it seems to me like he suffered from a heart attack," said the doctor.

"Is he going to live?" I asked.

"We will have to wait and see," the doctor responded.

I was out of breath and so very nervous of what was going to occur next. Plugging in the device, I hurried to hook up Uncle Tom to monitor his heart. The respiratory technician stood on a stool step and was compressing her hands on his chest, performing what is called CPR. The phlebotomist drew samples of his blood for enzyme analysis while the cardiac care nurse kept tabs on his circulatory system. The room was so crowded, the people were almost standing on top of each other and it felt like the hazy weather outside. All you could hear was the doctor giving us orders. When he checked for his pulse, he couldn't find it.

On the recorded table sheet, I had noticed a flatline which indicated that Uncle Tom had already been dead at least 30 seconds. At that point, it felt like my heart had just dropped down to my feet. Dr. O'Reilly had pronounced him dead to the staff and discontinued CPR. The nurses were emotionally overwhelmed by my reactions and felt bad that I witnessed his death.

"Why? Why did he have to die?" I asked, crying with my head on the doctor's shoulder.

Unexpectedly, just before disconnecting the chest leads of the EKG Machine, a pulse was picked up by the remaining four leads which printed out on the recorded table sheet since I had not shut off the main power switch. Could this be happening? Is this for real or am I seeing things? I asked myself.

"Dr. O'Reilly!, Dr. O'Reilly!" I said, "I've got a pulse!" He ran in the room and said, "This is incredible!" He called the staff back in the room and continued CPR.

"Do you think he has a second chance, Doctor?" I asked.

"If we can keep his pulse at this rate, he may have a slight chance," he replied. Uncle Tom's breathing became heavier and his eyes slowly began to open.

"Uncle Tom! Can you hear me?" I asked. He looked over to me and smiled. "You're gonna make it!" I said, with tears running down my face.

My uncle's blood pressure and pulse became normal again. That's what I hoped it would remain. He was transferred to the Cardiac Care Unit where further observations and testing were required regarding the heart attack, of which he had no past medical history. Uncle Tom had a blockage in the left ventricle of his heart which caused the attack to occur. He recuperated quite rapidly, more than what his doctors and our family had ever expected. Medications and frequent visits to the doctor became a requirement in case of any changes in his condition.

I always believe in what my instincts tell me: if you have faith in God and pray to him, he will replenish you in various ways. I believe in miracles, too, for miracles do happen. I've experienced a very special one, and it can also happen to you.

Life's Losses

by Marjorie N. Poore

Every child has a vision of what they want to be when they grow up. Little girls want to become prima ballerinas or famous models and little boys want to be all-star quarter backs or fire fighters. My ambition was to become a veterinarian.

I had always enjoyed the companionship of the many pets we had living in the circle of our family, but my greatest joy was taking care of strays and injured wildlife that either I would find or someone else would find and bring to me. My father seemed to dread those moments but my mother was always understanding and encouraged me never to lose my humanity for those weaker than myself or unable to fend for themselves.

Sad to say though, the years went on and due to one reason or another I gave up my dreams as most little boys and girls do, but I was fortunate to get the chance to play the role of the vet without the degree in one major episode at the age of thirteen.

It all happened on a summer's Saturday, during the year that Sununu wanted to be the governor of New Hampshire and I was struggling to find a place to fit in and be recognized for who I was in the crazy, messed up household of my family.

I had gone over on a Friday to spend the night with June, who was my best and dearest friend. It wasn't often that we were able to see one another because she resided in Greenland and I lived in Newmarket, so we were going to take full advantage of the weekend -- or so we thought.

We awoke on Saturday only to find ourselves in what had to be the shittiest weather Mother Nature could dish out. You couldn't even tell it was nine o'clock in the morning, because the sky was so black with clouds that were readying themselves to pour down upon the earth with the gallons of water they had stored in the sponges of their cotton walls -- and I do mean gallons.

"Well... What are we supposed to do now?" June was asking me as she walked across the cold linoleum tile floor of the kitchen to let her dog Missy out (Missy was a cross between a wire hair terrier and at the least three other kinds of breeds. To put it bluntly, she was rather homely for a dog but her sweet disposition made up for that), and to survey the damage done to the plans of our day.

"I don't know," I answered her. "We could go downstairs, ya know, and play a game of cards. Who knows? The weather might clear."

I was sitting at the dining room table sipping a cup of hot cocoa trying not to nod off, with what had to be two thousand pieces of a jigsaw puzzle her mother had been working on for about three months in front of me.

"All right," she said with a grudging voice and with that we

headed toward the cellar door.

We had just reached the entrance of it when a high pitched, rather whiny noise came from within the bathroom walls, directly next to where we stood.

"June," the word lingered for an eternity. It was her sister Dawn. "Can you come help me off the toilet?" she asked. Dawn had been born paralyzed from the waist down, but by the way she acted at times you would believe her whole body was incapable of any mobility. It never failed to drive June nuts, not so much because she was constantly tending to her, but because in all reality Dawn could do it herself -- she was just too busy feeling sorry for herself. (At least that's what the doctor was always telling their family.)

"Hold on and I'll be right there!" June yelled through the pine door. "Marj, go on down stairs and set up the table. I'll be down in about ten minutes."

"No problem," I said, and went my way while she went hers, turning my head in her direction only in time to see her disappear through the door way.

My hand reached out for the cold brass knob, turning and opening the door. I stood there staring into the room before me and tried to get my eyes to adjust. It was as black as the sky outside, but it had a pungent gloominess of mildew and dust to go with it. The worst part was you had to wait until you reached the bottom to hit the switch to spread some light on the subject before you.

"God, I hate this!" I hissed to myself as I blindly fumbled around for the railing that would lead me safely down the stairway. NOT!

As soon as my foot was on the first step my body was flying out from under me. "AAAaaaaa," I screamed, as my back hit the hard narrow steps. I could hear it as it slammed down on each one and with it came a pain I don't even think I would wish upon my worst of enemies. Apparently, June could hear it also because as soon as I hit bottom she was right behind me, laughing. Oddly enough though, so was I. We got ourselves in such a hysteria that we didn't even notice Missy come in through her doggy door that June's father had made in the outside cellar door a year before, until she dropped something she was carrying in her mouth at the foot of my feet and then nonchalantly plopped her butt down next to it. Still giggling, both of us looked down and viewed her offering by the light of the upstairs hallway.

We had to be thinking the same thing when our faces turned to meet each other's because we both had the same expression of disbelief. She had brought us an offering of a woodchuck, of all things, and not just any woodchuck, but one that was only eighty percent dead and a hundred percent pregnant! June was readying herself to go into a fit of disgusted madness and quickly moved her thirteen year old behind as far away from it as possible. I, on the other hand, sat there. I couldn't help but watch the slow

irregular breaths it took while struggling for a lung full of air.

"June, we can't just let this thing die like this. I know I wouldn't want to suffer."

Her grey blue eyes stood out of their sockets for a moment as though they had heard what I had just said but didn't think they were hearing right.

"And just what is it we should do, Marj?" She was anxious as she spoke and I couldn't blame her. After all, from every thing she had told me prior about her life she had never had to deal with something like this.

"Where's Bob?" I asked,(Bob was her older brother, an artist by rights and not lacking in looks, however, his personality could use a touch up of human decency) as I bent over the large wet hairy body and lifted it up and cradled it within my arms.

"I don't know. Why?" Her voice was a little calmer when she spoke this time but her body still showed signs of unwanted nervousness.

My eyes met hers and I tried to show a bit of understanding. I didn't want to tell her what had to be done because I knew she would freak out again, but there was no other choice.

"We're going to have to have him kill it," I explained to her.

"No! You can't do that, It's cruel, Marj" she screamed out, and the sound echoed around the cold damp room. If anyone else was home I'm sure they would have been coming to investigate. But there wasn't anyone but Dawn and she wouldn't have moved from where she was even if the house was caving in on her. The fact was, I didn't have the patience to sit there and explain to June how it would be even crueler to allow the woodchuck to stay alive in the pain it was suffering for who knew how long. She appeared to have understood this and no longer objected to any more of the decisions I made from there on in.

She went up the stairs as swiftly as her shaking legs would carry her to call her brother, while I gathered up a blanket from the laundry pile waiting to be washed, to bring some warmth to the poor creature's shivering body and to relieve a bit of the uncomfortable feeling it gave my own body as I held it. The creature's wetness didn't bother me, but its fur was coarse and scratched my flesh through the t-shirt I wore. The woodchuck was infested with fleas that were in full view as they ran around searching unsuccessfully for a dry warm spot on its body and there were so many ticks of all varieties that my skin was beginning to crawl.

June had turned on the light when she went upstairs so that finding the blanket wasn't hard. I had just gotten it wrapped around the little critter when she returned with the news that she couldn't get a hold of her brother.

" Well, I'm just going to have to do it myself," I told her and sent her back up stairs to retrieve one of her mother's

sharpest filleting knives. On the way up, she questioned me about the babies inside its belly.

" After all, " she said, "we can't let them die too." I agreed and together we decided I would perform a c-section on the woodchuck to try and save them. We had nothing to lose and we both figured she had to be near her final weeks of carrying them.

I set up a place to operate at the clothing table that sat next to the washer against the east wall of the basement. The lighting was best there so I would have a good view of what I was doing. June, in the meantime, was gathering up old, but clean rags,(we could have used clean ones if we ourselves were looking to be killed by her psychotic mother), a box and blanket to put the babies in, a hot water bottle filled, to place underneath the blanket to keep them as warm as possible and two pairs of her other brother Donald's latex gloves (why he always had latex gloves I don't really know and from what I know of him I don't believe I want to; he is Dawn's twin).

When she brought everything needed to the table, I put a pair of gloves on my hands. They were dry and powdery, and it gave my hands the feeling that I had just run them over a chalkboard that hadn't been cleaned. I tried to ready myself for the sad and unwanted task of putting the woodchuck out of its misery. I prayed to God for his forgiveness of what I was about to do. He must have heard me, because when I unraveled the blanket she was dead. He had spared me from having to experience that much.

Quickly, I laid her on the table in front of me and readied the knife. It was hard to keep it steady due to the fleas, who apparently sensing her departure, began flinging themselves off her carcass -- there had to be millions of them. June wanted to run back up stairs and get the can of Raid, but I quickly instructed her not to: it would hurt the babies, should they still be alive when I got them out of her stomach.

Once the majority of the biting little insects leapt off her carcass, and it was harder to detect them, I then proceeded to make an incision into the middle of the belly. I wasn't prepared for the amount of blood and bodily fluids that gushed out from her insides as I punctured the flesh. It was warm and sticky and it had the appearance of a bunch of rodents being mixed up in an electric blender. The smell was one I don't believe I wish my nose to have to encounter again. But still, I did not let it distract my focus.

June was doing every thing in her power not to look, but I noticed a couple of times that she let her curiosity get the better of her.

"This has got to be the most disgusting thing in the world," she mumbled through her hands as she held them tight over her mouth and eyes.

"Ya, I'd have to agree," I replied and continued to cut.

You could hear the ripping of the flesh as the blade of the knife separated the skin. I had cut her width wise from one side of the stomach to the other and was able to see her uterus. Then taking the very tip of the knife I carefully punctured the blubbery sack. It was much thicker than I had anticipated and I thought I was going to cut the babies a couple of times.

"Take a look at this!" I motioned to June as I finished the incision. Slowly she removed her hands from her eyes and peered down into the bloody mess of the woodchuck. I watched with a sense of gratification as an excited smile rapidly took the place of the horrified expression that her face had held since the whole ordeal had begun.

"Oh Marj, they're beautiful," she cried out as she looked at the three small babies in front of her, each surrounded by a slimy almost transparent, milky colored membrane. Now, anxious to have the job finished, she hurried me as I removed and discarded the afterbirth. Then, each of us taking one in our hand, we began to clean the wet bloody mucus from their small bodies and placed them in the warm comfort of the blankets in the box prepared for them.

When the last one was laid down and secure I turned to June and gave her the biggest hug my body could produce and congratulated her on a job well done.

" Me? " she said, in disbelief. "I didn't do anything." As she said this, her mouth almost looked like it had eaten a lemon and with this comical expression and the relief of knowing everything was completed, I broke out into a laugh.

" June," I told her, "had it not been for you, even in the hysterics that you were, I couldn't have done it." The prune look vanished from her face and she began to show her own pride.

"Now, let's go look at those babies," I said, and we did just that.

For all the happiness we had just been feeling, it was soon taken away when we looked into the box. All three pink little bodies were still and not one had a single breath. I don't understand why they were given life and then died like they did, but I figure it was all for the best. I had misjudged their age; I know that much from sight alone. They should have been carried at least four more weeks, so they just weren't developed enough to stand up to the elements outside their mother's womb. Still, we couldn't help but cry from the loss. After all, we had come so far and lost so much.

We put them in the box with their mother and buried them in the back yard, in the rain, near an apple tree. Then we went back inside and cleaned up the mess where it had all taken place. Neither of us said a word as we did, not because we regretted having done what we just did, but we both had to find our own way of placing it within the choices of our lives.

My First Kiss

by Pamela Rousseau

Summertime always brings back special memories about a place or a different expereince that can remind one of those special times through your childhood years. The summer of 1979 was that special time when I got kissed for the first time, at the age of 10. Remembering that special moment in my life still brings back that little girl left inside of me.

It was a warm sunny day, and my best friend Terry and I were rollerskating out in front of our house, a four apartment complex. She was on one end and I was on the other.

"I think he's the cutest boy on the block," I told her. She was singing "Pam likes Robbie" as she was rollerskating around me in a circle. Robert Hough was his name, but we nicknamed him Robbie. He lived right around the corner from us. I talked to him all the time, and we were good friends. A big group of us would get together every night to play hide and seek.

"Do you think I should talk to Michael and see if Robbie likes me?" I asked Terry. Michael Kadlec lived right behind Robbie's house and was really good friends with him. The more I thought about it, the faster I skated around in circles.

"It doesn't hurt to ask," Terry said. "Ask him tonight when they come over to play."

That night everyone came over except for Robbie. He was sick so his mother kept him home all night. I was anxious to see him, but this was a perfect opportunity to talk to Michael wihout Robbie around.

I pulled him aside and told him I liked Robbie. "Could you talk to him for me and see what he says," I asked.

"I think I can work out a plan," He said. "Leave it to me." I gave him a hug to thank him.

I can remember the times when my friends and I thought boys were gross, even our brothers, and we would cringe at the idea of even going near them. Now here I was talking to somebody about a boy that I liked! Times sure do change!

After our hide and seek game, Michael told me that he would talk to Robbie. I couldn't sleep that night because I was wondering what would happen.

The next day, Terry and I were rollerskating again out in the street.

"I'm so nervous," I said. "What if he doesn't like me! I'll feel so stupid."

"Don't worry about it too much," Terry said. "He does talk to you a lot." All of a sudden, Michael was running down the street towards me. My heart was beating faster the closer he got

to me.

"Robbie wants to go out with you," Michael said. "He wants you to go over to his house about 7 o'clock tonight."

I thought I was having a heart attack because my heart was beating so fast with excitement. That night, I told my parents I was going over Terry's house and then out for a walk. Terry helped me to get myself pretty so I would leave a good impression on him.

"So, how do you think things will go tonight," Terry asked.

"I hope they go well," I replied. "I'm so nervous right now I don't know if I want to do this anymore."

Robbie's house was around the corner, but I wanted to take my time so I could get my tongue untied. I arrived at his house at 7:05. He had his window open and he was lying in bed looking out his window to see me.

"Hello," I said. "How are you feeling?"

"A lot better than yesterday," he replied.

Both of us just stood there without a word to say. We both felt shy. It was a lot easier to talk to him before when things weren't out in the open. Finally, we started talking about things which made it easier. Then he asked me, "Have you ever been kissed before?" My heart dropped. I wasn't expecting this question. I could remember the time when our friend Charlene from school went out with this boy named Ricky who lived down the street from us. They went around the side of my house to kiss. Terry and I spied on them and all we could do was make sick faces and gag ourselves over the thought of kissing a boy. Those feelings changed all of a sudden. The thought of kissing Robbie Hough was like a dream come true.

"No, I've never been kissed before," I said. "Have you?" He replied the same. He wanted me to pull myself up into his window so he could kiss me, but I was in his front yard and was afraid of the neighbors seeing us. He understood.

"I'd rather be alone anyway," he said, "but how about tomorrow around two o'clock in my cellar? I'll wait for you in the back yard." I agreed. I felt like this was one of the most important issues I ever had to make a decision about. But the curiousity was definitely there.

"I'll see you tomorrow then," I said, then left. All I could think about was what my parents would do if they found out. I promised myself thet only Terry would know.

The next day I woke up and got myself ready to go over to Robbie's for the big moment. Terry came over and layed the questions on me: What happened? What did you say? What did he say?

"He wants to kiss me," I said. "I'm going over there at two."

"Oh my god, you're going to get your first kiss! I'm so jealous," she said. "Tell me everything that happens."

The clock said 1:45 and I felt so nervous that I almost made myself sick. Then I thought about his cute face and what it was going to be like to kiss him and I didn't feel so nervous. I finally got my nerve up to let my feet walk over to his house. Terry was sitting on the porch and she whispered "good luck." Some of the gang were out in the street playing touch football with my two brothers. They all noticed me walking around the corner.

Robbie was waiting for me in the yard like he said. We both had that same nervous expression on our faces.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes."

Michael was sitting on his porch with a big smile and said "Have fun you two lovebirds." We let out nervous laughter which made us both feel better.

Robbie opened the door to go down the cellar stairs. The room was dark and musty smelling, but the sun was beaming in the cellar window enough for us to see well. Boxes were piled up neatly for enough room to walk around. We could hear his family walking around upstairs, which made me nervous, thinking that maybe they could hear us too.

"Are you nervous?" Robbie asked. I told him I was.

"I hope I do okay," I said.

He came right up to me and out his hands on my waist. I let out a sigh of relief and looked straight at him. How cute he is, I thought: his dark brown hair, dark eyes that looked like the ones of a puppy, thick eyebrows, olive skin with cheeks I could pinch all day, and his tiny mouth about to kiss me.

It happened. He kissed me and I froze with my eyes open. He stepped back. "I feel a lot better," he said.

"I didn't think it was all that bad either," I replied.

"How about a ten second kiss," he asked.

"Let's try again.," I said.

He came up to me and kissed me again. I felt a new part of my life changing in those ten seconds -- changing from not even liking boys to getting sick at the thought of kissing a boy to liking boys and then liking to kiss a boy! I wanted to stay in that cellar forever with him.

Robbie stepped back "I was nervous, but it went away. I liked kissing you," he said.

"I was afraid too, but when you kissed me, it went away because I liked it!" I said. The ice had been broken -- we went through it together and both enjoyed it.

Then suddenly, we looked out my window and there was my brother Brian standing and looking in. He took off when we saw him. Michael was knocking on the door telling me that Brian just ran off to tell my mother.

"I'm dead," I said.

On the way home,I saw Terry, who was sitting on her porch, eager to ask a million questions. I told her everything but I

just wasn't as excited about it anymore, because my brother had ruined an important turn in my life. I felt like it was the end of the world.

My mother came outside and called me in. She sat down on the porch and I sat next to her. She was still in her work clothes.

"How was it," she asked.

I looked at her in total surprise.

"Do you think you're in trouble?"

"Yes."

"Pam, when I was your age, I got my first kiss too. Those are the things that all girls cherish for the rest or our lives," she said. "So ... were you nervous?"

"Yes, I was nervous but it went away and it was very special," I said.

"My first kiss is still very special to me," she said.

I saw Robbie the next day and told him things went well and there was nothing to worry about. So, we kept seeing each other at the usual neighborhood games, and to be alone to kiss. Things faded out quickly between us, but we started each other on the right track for years to come.

Fourteen years later, I see Robbie Hough all the time. We talk when we get a chance. I still think he is as cute as the time when I was ten. I can still bring back a flutter excitement over being kissed by one of the cutest boys on the block. As an adult, I see that with all my relationships, each person leaves something in my heart, good or bad. Robbie has captured that little girl with a crush that will last forever.

VA.85

by Kurt Stephan

It was 6:30 one morning in January 1984. I was in my second year as a Navy plane captain, and the squadron I was attached to, VA.85, was sent to the aircraft carrier CV.67 John F. Kennedy, which was sent to the Middle East as a peace keeping force. We were mainly there to protect our own troops and the people of Lebanon from the terrorists that had taken over the airport.

I'd just woken up when my buddy Dave came by.

"It's still early," he said, "so why don't we go get some breakfast."

I thought that was a good idea. We went down to the galley and there was hardly anyone there, so we ate quickly and went up to the shop a little bit early. When we got there, no one was around, so I put on a helmet and vest and went up to the flight deck to see what was going on.

It was a nice day, about eighty-five degrees, and the sun was just rising up over the horizon. It was bright orange with a little red in it. The sky was a bright blue with a few puffy white clouds which looked like they where suspended by string. The water was a clear light blue, and if you looked down you could almost see the bottom of the ship, which is at least seventeen stories below the surface. Every once in a while you could see schools of flying fish skipping across the water.

I noticed that the ordnance people were unloading the thousand pound laser-guided bombs, which are mainly used for destroying buildings or tanks. This wasn't unusual; they had been doing that twice a day since we got to the Mediterranean. They where replacing them with five hundred pound cluster bombs, which are anti-personnel bombs. They explode about one hundred feet above the ground, throwing out chunks of metal, so there really is nowhere to hide.

It was now about 7:30 a.m., and I had to get ready to launch my plane. There were a lot more planes than usual on the deck; there were only two fighter planes in the air. I was just getting ready to start up my plane when Dave said we were launching a lot more planes today than usual. The ship was turning into the wind, and the planes where getting ready to go. I was just finishing getting my plane ready by making sure there were no hydraulic, oil, or fuel leaks.

My plane moved up to the catapult, and unfolded its wings. All the flight controls where checked, and it was ready to connect to the catapult. The jet blast deflector went up, and

they revved the engines up to full power. The roaring was so loud that it made my whole body shake. Even with the helmet on I had to cover my ears to keep the helmet on tight. The officer at the catapult saluted the pilot and gave the signal to launch the plane. There was a loud roar followed by a big thud, and the plane took off. As it reached the end of the deck it dropped down about five feet before it started to climb. I watched the plane disappear into the sunrise.

"Dave, do you think they'll drop the bombs this time?" I said.

"Probably not," he replied.

"Yeah, they never do," I said.

It was a long two hours before my plane came back. I could hear them but they weren't in sight yet, and as they made their first pass by the ship I could see they had no bombs on them. When they landed on the ship, they where taxied right over to the spot where they would be chained down. Usually they had to wait for the ordnance people to put the pins in the bombs. But not this time. As the pilot was getting out of the plane, I asked, "Did you drop those bombs on Lebanon?"

"Yeah, I had two direct hits," he said.

I had been out there doing the same job, twelve hours a day for the last three months, and this was the first time that they had dropped bombs on anyone.

Everyone was happy and cheering because they didn't have to unload the bombs, and the fact that that was what we were trained to do. It didn't really matter to them that terrorists who had earlier blown up the Marine barracks were killed (because they instigated the whole thing in the first place), but no one thought about the innocent people who were killed. They had nothing to do with any of this. We were supposed to be a peace keeping force. I never thought we would end up killing anyone.

Even though I wasn't one of the pilots who did the actual bombing, there is still a sense of responsibility, knowing that I was the plane captain who made it possible for that plane to be flying its mission that day. I was bothered by being part of a peace keeping force that really wasn't keeping the peace anymore. I guess it changed the way I think about life, and how quick and easy it can come to an end.

My Engagement

by Michael Tardif

It was a cold, early November morning, the day before Thanksgiving in 1990. Waking up to a dreary morning made me nervous to think of what I was about to do. I had to prepare myself to be at Logan Airport to fly down to Norfolk Airport in Virginia Beach.

I'd already spoken with my girlfriend's mother, who lives in Virginia, on the telephone. I needed to ask for her blessing for her daughter's hand in marriage. I was hesitant to ask, but I knew it was the proper thing to do considering Yvonne's father had passed away when she was a child. It was nice to hear, with the excitement in her voice of my asking, saying "Welcome to my little family, son." I explained to her that I was to propose to Yvonne on my arrival at the Norfolk Airport.

Yvonne had already spent a few days, prior to my arrival, with her family. She was able to get more time out of work than I was. It was her turn to spend the holiday with her family.

My thoughts and coordination were not with me on this morning before my 11 a.m. flight from Boston. Putting together my suitcase and trying not to forget the engagement ring, a photo of Yvonne, and two dozen long stem red roses accompanied by a single white rose, seemed like an eternal list. I became especially nervous of the thought that I was departing to the airport to propose to my best friend, Yvonne.

The ride into Boston seemed like a long tedious journey. The conversation with my sister, Nancy, whom was transporting me there, was comforting, as she was trying to ease the tension in me. She was constantly repeating, "Michael, don't worry. Everything will turn out just fine." I wished that to be true and also wished that my sister could have come with me for extra support.

Nancy dropped me at my terminal, sending me off with praise and encouragement. On checking in, an airline representative commented on how she thought that it was a nice gesture to have bought her two dozen roses for her service. We both laughed with amusement.

"What's the special occasion, Michael?" she asked. I explained to her that I was about to get engaged in Virginia. She congratulated me and sent me off to board my plane.

As one of the first people to board the plane, my seat was directly in the front, right behind first-class. Everyone passing by one the way to their seats was smiling at me with the sight of the flowers on my lap. A young woman named Toni, a Boston University student who was going home for the holiday, sat beside me at the window seat.

"Who's the lucky girl", she replied.

"They're for my girlfriend, Yvonne, whom I'm about to propose to," I said. After explaining the method of how I was going to propose to Yvonne, Toni had a tear in her eye and that was when I knew I was going about this the right way. If it meant a lot to a complete stranger, I was sure it would effect Yvonne even more.

The plane was filled with all its passengers and prepared itself for takeoff. The flight attendants were standing in the middle aisle going over the safety procedures of the plane and my mind was in a complete daze. I could see her but I couldn't hear her. With butterflies in my stomach and my mind wandering thinking of Yvonne, I had no clue that the plane was already in midair. I glanced over at Toni, but she was laying back listening to the Rolling Stones song "Jumping Jack Flash," on her head set. I pulled the picture out of Yvonne and admired her beauty. She was so sweet and innocent looking with that big beautiful smile. I knew I wanted no one else to grow old with except with my buddy, Yvonne.

Now was the time to accomplish what I'd come here to do. As I stood to look around, my knees felt as if they were going to buckle up, but this was not the time to be a chicken. I glanced over to my first victims in helping me with my proposal. They were in the seats behind mine and knelt near them. I introduced myself to the older couple and explained to them that I was going to propose to my girlfriend and needed their help. Their puzzled faces were looking at me as if to say how can we possible help you in this situation? I told them that Yvonne would be waiting for me as soon we deplaned, and asked if they could each just take a rose and walk right up to her, hand her the rose, and then walk away without saying a word.

"But we don't even know what she looks like," the woman said.

I took the picture out of my pocket and handed it over to them. Passengers behind them were glancing forward to see what was going on and so the woman explained to her what I was about to do. Everyone got a big kick out of this and agreed to help me out. With all the commotion going on, everyone on the plane was curious as to what I was about to do. Everyone was willing to help, and I passed out the last flower and showed the picture of Yvonne for the last time.

Back in my seat, I was trying to enjoy a soda, and the pilot

informed us that we would be arriving shortly. Voices in the background of people whispering and pointing at me, the guy in the front seat who was getting engaged, made me a little edgy but it was okay. I just wanted to get there and get it over with.

The plane landed and the passengers were beginning to stand to deplane. I figured that I would be the last one out, and waited while the 24 passengers who were holding Yvonne's roses all got out before me. Everyone walked by, patting me on the back, wishing me luck and their congratulations. I sat there, trying to smile as best as I could without having a scared look on my face. I wondered what Yvonne's expression and thoughts were, with people handing her roses for no reason. I wanted to be next to her to hear what was being said.

When I stood up after my daze, I noticed there wasn't anyone left on the plane, not a flight attendant or even a pilot. I picked up the white rose and headed off the plane. Stepping off the plane and onto the passage way to the terminal, I could hear a lot of mumbling like it was a big echo, and the further I walked the louder it got. I could see Yvonne at a distance, holding all the roses in her arms at the end of the passage with people behind her. The closer I got, the louder the mumbling was getting until I finally reached the end of the passage and noticed about 200 people all standing around Yvonne. As soon as they all noticed me, there was the enormous sound of applause and people screaming with cheers. I stepped towards Yvonne, and with tears in her eyes, she gave me a great big hug.

"What in the hell are you up to," she asked.

"Do you love me?" I asked.

"Of course I do!"

With the continuing sound of applause, I went down on my knees and retrieved the ring from my pocket. Yvonne's face was all confused until she noticed the ring in my hand.

"Will you marry me ,Yvonne?"

Her mom, who was holding a video camera near us, was crying away as she continued filming us, and Yvonne glanced in her direction and then back to me. She screamed out a great big "YES!" The roar of the audience surrounding us echoed throughout the terminal. Curious people were lingering around to find out what had happened. Yvonne's face was lit up like a Christmas tree. Her eyes were twinkling and her cheeks were red in her shyness. People began approaching us and sent out their congratulations and wished us the best of luck. I escorted Yvonne out, to spare her more embarrassment, to our awaiting limousine, to be alone to enjoy some champagne and to enjoy our ride to a new beginning.

Present Rhyme at Christmas Time

by Colleen White

The Christmas of 1986 was a strange one at my house. That year, my parents had a lot of bills, so money was short. Christmas is an important holiday in my house, so even though my parents could not afford to buy all the gifts they would have liked to get us, they picked one special gift for each of us.

I remember that Christmas morning when we all woke up and stood together before going downstairs to the tree. In my house, we all have to go down to the tree with everyone else so my parents can see the expression on our faces. My dad told us, "It's going to take you longer than three seconds to rip open your gifts this year." Dad had a smile on his lips, and in his eyes we could see happiness. My brothers and I decided not to ask questions because we wanted to see what we got. My mother was getting impatient too. She asked us, "Are you guys going to wait all morning or are you going to go downstairs?"

In one way, this Christmas was like the other ones: we could only open one gift before breakfast. The gift could be from anyone or be any size, but we could only open one. My brothers and I all went for the biggest, brightest boxes first. My dad, knowing what was in them, asked, "Are you sure you want to open the biggest ones first?" My oldest brother spoke for all of us when he said, "Yes, we're sure -- the bigger the better." With that said, we all tore open our boxes.

Being only 11 years old, I was not sure if my parents had made a mistake, or if they thought that I wanted a box full of tissue paper. I decided to look at what my brothers got before I asked my parents if it was an accident. To my surprise, my brothers got a box full of paper too, but they got a cassette tape with it. I decided to look through my box again. I looked and I did finally find a tape. It wasn't a new tape -- it had already been opened, so I took my tape and joined my brothers.

My parents opened a family gift and showed us what it was. The gift was a new tape deck for the living room. My dad could tell that I was a little confused about my new present. He told me not to worry; he was going to explain over breakfast. I took my tape to the kitchen table with me when it was time to eat.

Just like he told me he would, he explained. "It's not really the tape you are getting," he said. "You need to listen to the tape."

This little bit of information was what I needed to understand. It sent my imagination running. Dad said after

breakfast we would open the other gifts and then listen to the tape. I couldn't wait until the other gifts were open. I wanted to listen to the tape right then.

When breakfast was finished, we left the mess on the table and went into the living room. With all of us sitting around the tree, it looked the same as it did every year. My parents shared the couch while my brothers and I passed out the presents. Everyone got one present, and we took turns opening them, one by one. Even though it was the same way we did it every year, it felt different. I think the reason it felt different was because I was going to get a special present. I had something to look forward to after the presents were open. Knowing that changed Christmas morning for me.

"Do you guys want to open your gifts or not?" Those words came from my impatient father. My brothers and I thought that his cue was enough to start opening the presents. We started passing out presents and ripping them open.

We were taking turns opening the presents and I was getting more impatient by the minute. I got a lot of great gifts but I just tossed them aside. It seemed like nothing could be more important then what that tape had to say.

When it was finally time to listen to my tape, my dad put it in, then came and sat next to me. He asked me, "Are you ready? You must listen carefully!" I could not wait any longer, so I replied, "I have never been more ready in my life!" My dad started to play the tape. I heard my dad's voice. He was saying, "Christmas 1986. This goes to Colleen. This is a gift for you because you asked for it, and now you have to work for it. Under the _ _ _ _ you will find something _ _ _ _." Dad told me that it rhymed and that was the only hint that I got.

My dad played the tape one more time. This time I wrote down the rhyme. I studied the words and tried to think of every possibility to fit in the blanks. This time I was stumped. While my brothers were listening to their tapes I took mine to the kitchen to think.

My brothers heard their tapes and did not have as hard a time figuring out the rhymes as I did. In less than two hours, the wrapping paper and the other gifts were put away, and both my brothers had gotten their gifts. This was the first Christmas I did not have to help prepare dinner. Everyone told me to think about my gift instead of dinner.

I did as they said. I thought about my rhyme. I thought about it halfway through dinner. Then I finally started putting it together. I thought about everything I asked for, then tried to rhyme it with everything in the house. Once I got going, it

did not take me long to get the missing words. I got out my piece of paper with the rhyme. Then, I fit the two words that I thought would fit in. I was so happy that they fit in, I screamed them out, "I've got it. Under the SINK you will find something PINK!"

When I looked at my dad to see if I was right, he was just looking at me. He was not smiling or anything. Then I saw his lips curl up, and I knew I was right. We were not done with dinner, but that did not stop me from leaving the table.

As soon as I stood up and ran to the upstairs bathroom, everybody followed me. When we were all crammed into the bathroom, I looked for my present. I was still not sure what I was getting so I looked through everything.

"Nothing. There is not anything under here that I asked for," I said. When I looked up I could see that my brothers were disappointed for me, but my parents were still smiling. At that point, I knew something was not right. I thought about my rhyme one more time. Then it hit me: there was more than one sink in the house!

I took off running again. As soon as I got to the kitchen sink, I started ripping everything out of the cabinet. Everyone was standing around me when I pulled a box out from the very back of the cabinet. I looked up at my dad and told him, "This had better not be another box full of tissue paper." He laughed and said, "I don't know, maybe you should open it."

I ripped the box and threw the wrapping everywhere. In the box, there was a brand new pink radio. I told my dad, "Thank you. Now I have my own radio to listen to!" My mother and I cleaned up the sink cabinet and my dad set up my radio. The rest of dinner was spent listening to Christmas music on my new radio.

Even though my parents did not have a great deal of money, they gave us a great Christmas. I will never forget all that my parents did to make an unforgettable holiday.

On the Job:

Students were asked to describe, objectively, their first work experience.

"Ten Hut!"

by Ally Green

I stood motionless, fearful to take an even breath, weakness penetrating my lower limbs traveling upward and threatening to attack my spine. "Am I in hell?" The thought, like ice picks, jabbed my beleaguered brain waves. I looked straight ahead, my nostrils full of black, kinky, sweaty hair from the girl in front of me, as we stood meshed in together, hundreds of strange females, like black and white checkerboard squares. My feet, newly clad in dull, stiff, unyielding combat boots pressed tightly to the heels of the girl in front of me and so the lines went. Toe to heel, toe to heel, toe to heel.... I sensed the frightened tension as we crawled at a snail's pace to enter the chow hall; the drill sergeant's black swollen diabolical face loomed, shouting incessantly, threateningly.

My mind drifted back, thankfully, to four months ago. It was early May, 1977. I was 19 years old, and I had the world by the balls. I was a successful licensed practical nurse working and partying, just enjoying life. "Oh, why was I so greedy?" I bemoaned as I inched forward. I had wanted to become a Registered Nurse. "More money," I thought, but I wanted someone else to pay for my continuing education. My family couldn't, and I certainly wasn't going to work three jobs.

WE WANT YOU!

I was enticed by the finger pointing at me from the U.S. Army poster, and more interested in the "100 percent free college tuition." I was sold.

Excitedly, with money signs dancing in my head, the next day I went to the armory in Newburyport, Mass., and spoke to the recruiter. In two days I was signed, sealed and to be delivered to balmy Ft. Jackson, S.C. in four months, for a period of just 10 weeks basic training. "Piece of cake," I thought, with an unexpected bonus of five hundred dollars in my hand! With all this, I walked tall and proud from that infamous armory, my ego in fifth gear.

"Oh God," I lamented, my head pulsating with heat and pain, as I was back in line. "What did I do, what did I do?" I asked and prayed. Sweat trickled into my ears, agonizingly tickling me. I wanted to scream in frustration and madness.

We eventually trudged into the mess hall for chow. We were in line "marching" for two and a half hours. Here, I experienced my first introduction to one of the many army soldiers' job puns, "Hurry up and wait." As we got our trays and

sat down, "Five minutes you good for nothing...," blared the drill Sergeant, "Get it down or lose it, and get your lazy asses back in formation!"

Never having been treated like this before in my life, and just shocked, I felt tears start to well and my nose trickled fluid to my upper lip that I didn't dare to wipe. A soft faceless voice with a southern accent warned me sharply from behind, "Stop, don't let 'em get you. Don't let 'em see you. You'll die if you do." Somehow I held it together, gulping over and over, but I didn't cry and I never did during basic after that. I was becoming a lean, mean, fighting machine, my first real transformation from a civilian into a soldier.

I made it back into formation, my stomach empty as I couldn't eat. The lot of us, with the verbal abuse and obscenities keeping stride, finally got back to the dirty and lonely barracks. Four hours later, we were in our sheetless bunks, exhausted. I stared into the blackness. Quiet weeping and soft sniffles punctuated the otherwise silent night. I didn't sleep for a long time. I didn't think. I felt nothing.

Life at Ft. Jackson from day one onward was an intense experience. Nothing quite compared to that first day though and the initial shock of what signed, sealed and delivered meant. There were 150 females in my platoon. Four were platoon leaders and I was one of them. Why were we chosen? The four of us did more than 60 push-ups in two minutes, mine being tops at 68. If I knew then what I know now, I would've only done ten push-ups or so. I was young, naive and at ground zero as to leadership qualities, but I am a perfectionist, and I was going to do my best. Also, I was afraid to fail. I was afraid of them. Many times, I was resentful and pissed-off that I was chosen or noted only for my strength in my arms, but as the ten weeks dwindled down, I proved myself otherwise, to them and to me. I was made of much more than an Army push-up as I was chosen a candidate for soldier of the year which encompassed mind, muscle and spirit.

My job and responsibilities differed greatly from the other female soldiers. It was difficult also to be close to anyone because of my higher rank. I guess in a way we were their bosses, and we, platoon leaders, answered to the drill sergeants. I took pride in wearing stripes, but a lot of times I wished I was a regular soldier. Among the regular soldiers there seemed a camaraderie which was not shared with me. The one thing the Army did mandate was a buddy system, where the drill would randomly chose another female to be your buddy. Your buddy does not leave your side. You'd go to mess hall with her. You did guard duty with her. You were on the firing range with her. Most of all, you would depend on her during wartime to cover your back and you hers. My buddy was Paula Carver from Atlanta, GA.. I did get very close to Paula.

I was responsible for following through on orders from the drill, for the females in my platoon as well as myself. One of my responsibilities was keeping the barracks spotless. Anything and everything a white glove could reach, wipe or touch was susceptible to the drills' roving hand. If you've ever heard that in the army you are made to scrub floors or toilets with toothbrushes, well, it's true. (Your own toothbrush not excluded.) It was my job to have the females in my platoon ready for inspections: clothes, lockers, gear, beds, spit-shined combat boots you could see your reflection in and many rank and army rule memorizations all had to be ready for scrutiny at a moment's notice.

I had to be tough in many ways. I had to motivate my privates to be physical, to do male push-ups, sit-ups and run with their buddy any free time they could. We already had physical training ranging for two hours, sometimes twice a day. I still had to push. My job was to have every single private in my platoon pass the physical training test at the end of ten weeks, for their sake and for mine. They really thought I was a "Drill-kiss-ass bitch." They didn't know I paid for any mistake or failure. Many a time I sat alone all night, shining what seemed like hundreds of boots, the drills' boots, cleaning their toilets with my toothbrush, or standing guard duty in full gear, sixty pounds, up on a chair in the drill's office with my face to the wall. Yeah, it was so easy being a platoon leader. I would've gladly told everyone where to go most of the time.

For the many times I took pain or punishment for the action of a female in my platoon, especially one I may have spent extra time with, well, let me just say, that after I was through with her, an all-night toilet cleaning party by herself, a lighter of the punishments, usually straightened her out.

Another responsibility I had was to learn to handle an M-16 weapon and successfully complete a course on a firing range and succeed. I learned to carry my weapon properly if marching, running, or diving in supervised combat games. To develop stamina and perseverance, we marched ten miles with sixty pounds on our backs and our M16 weapon held out in front of us. Imagination and prayer were much needed comrades on this mission.

I also was taught and had to teach many tasks to prepare us for wartime activity. These tasks ranged from learning how to use other weapons to setting up field mines. I learned to dress and camouflage myself for simulated war missions, as live ammo fire buzzed above me. We did this daytime and nighttime. I learned and taught females the use of a compass, a few times getting lost in the engulfing, horrendously humid jungles of S.C.

I wondered numerous times during my ten weeks of basic training what the heck I was doing. I felt many times that I had made a mistake in joining the army, for I never wanted to fight. Then many times the adrenaline coursed through my veins and I was caught up with the new-found strength in my muscles, with the tack sharp mental alertness that poised me, and I felt pride with my adroit ability with weapons and even a bayonet. I was a soldier. My job was to be ready, willing and able to fight for and protect my country at any given moment, and I was.

I realize in retrospect that from that first day on, I was stripped of who I thought I was. Through techniques, some of which were cruel and abusive, and some calculatingly intelligent and effective, I became a virtual stranger to myself in ten weeks. I now understand that this was Uncle Sam's intention.

Basic training is blunt trauma to one's whole system and emotions, and a challenge likened to the survival of the fittest. I learned I could live in hell for ten weeks and actually beat it. I realized that people are able to reach much deeper inside themselves for what they need, and that I could reach in deeper inside me and actually find something. I found out that it's all in how you adapt and utilize your mental capacity. I was able to follow an order without thinking,and, more importantly, I acquired the knowledge to become an effective leader. I also mastered the much-needed technique on how to, "Hurry up and wait," without losing my mind.

I left Ft. Jackson, S.C. definitely and permanently a changed woman. Yes, I have many negative memories, but do you know, one of my favorite memories is shaking the hand of that diabolical drill Sargent with tears in my eyes when I said goodbye. The U.S. army taught me who Ally Green was and who she could become. What I was taught will remain with me forever.

I served in the U.S Army for nine years, six of them with the 508th Combat Medical Infantry Unit, honorably discharged for a medical condition. I served my unit as a 1st Lieutenant, an army nurse, education paid for in full by that finger that pointed at me years ago. I wore my uniform with dignity, and I still get tingles and goosebumps of pride when I think back at the opportunity and incredible learning experience I was allowed by God to serve as a soldier in the United States Army.

Expertise:

Students were asked to describe a process they consider themselves "expert" at.

HOW TO SURVIVE A LAY-OFF

by Thomas Castine

Most people think getting laid-off from their job is the worst thing that could happen. Yes, you do have to change your lifestyle a little. If you enjoyed going out to eat while you were working, that would probably stop. You have to spend your money wisely. No more forty dollar hair cuts. You may have to settle for a ten dollar one. If changing your lifestyle a bit is the worst thing that you ever have to do, you'll be lucky. I was at my last job ten years and in those years I was laid-off three times. So if I can do it, anyone can. If you follow a few suggestions, it shouldn't be that bad.

The first thing you will feel is anger. The anger you feel is at the company. You feel you gave the company one hundred percent. You put in long hours when you could just as easily have said, " This can wait until tomorrow." This is what you get for caring about your job.

This will probably happen the first week you are out of work. Don't take out your anger on your family and friends. If you feel anger taking hold of you, go for a walk, or clean the garage. You will be amazed how fast you get it clean. Try to stay away from your family because they will want to talk about it and that would upset you more. These are the people that will help you through the tougher times later. During this period, there is not much they can do. You simply have to control the anger.

The place you should avoid (but oftentimes cannot) is the unemployment office. The people at the unemployment office seem to know how to upset you very easily. You do not want to be there and they act like they don't want you there. Think of it this way: if it wasn't for people like me (or you) they would not have a job. Bring a book to the office with you, because you could be there anywhere from a half-hour to two hours or more. This will take your mind off how long you have been waiting, and if it's a good book, this would give you time to really get into it.

Second, if your employer is willing to have you retrained, jump at the chance. Take the opportunity, because it is most likely free. I don't know of anybody that would turn down anything that was free. Let them pay for you to learn a new skill and maybe even help you land a better paying job. If you go back to school, take something that you're interested in, not what the company wants you to take. Unless you have been in school recently, this may be a little overwhelming.

This will help with the depression that sets in around the third week. This is when you realize that you are not going back to your old job and you are going to have to start over at a new company. This is the time when your family and friends can help you understand that this wasn't meant to happen, but it will give you a chance to learn new skills.

One way to deal with the depression is to do something you like to do. If you have a hobby, work at that. Think of something you always wanted to do, but had no time for and do it. Enjoy the time off -- go to the beach, even if it is not summer time. Sit in a park and read a newspaper. If you have children, do something with them. Do not just sit and think. Keep your mind active. Learn to take every day slower than you did before. Plan your days or you will find very quickly that you have more free time on your hands than you want, and that gives you more time to think. You may not have this free time when you get your next job, so enjoy it while it lasts.

Third, every penny counts. Make those credit cards disappear. Do not use them: try to use cash instead. If you don't have the cash, try to save up for what you want, instead of buying something you don't need. Put some money aside, because unemployment is taxable and the I.R.S. will want their money on time. You are required to pay your taxes four times a year.

If you have two cars, and can get by with one, do it. Take one off the road until you go back to work. People think doing this costs more money when they put them back on the road. Think how much money you are paying in insurance every two months, six months, or even in a year.

When you buy your food, look for the white containers. This is the generic food. They are not name brands, but they are made the same and cost less. If your children are fussy and only will eat name brands, do this: try to keep a name brand container and put the generic brand in it. They will never know.

Hopefully if you knew ahead of time about the lay-off, you put some money aside. This would help with the rent, heat, and the light bills. If you had no money set aside, it will be tough.

There <u>are</u> things you can do. Get a job under the table: this means to find a place that will hire you and will not take taxes out of your pay. This way, you can put in as many hours as you like, but it would probably not pay much. Unemployment allows you to earn one third of your unemployment check without losing a penny.

If you follow these few ideas or come up with your own, think them through carefully and I am sure you will survive. Like I said at the beginning, I was laid-off three times. I survived two and am now surviving the third lay-off. I am learning new skills. I am in the Personal Computer Certificate Program and learning about computers. This is something I always wanted to do but had no time for. I took this course because I feel that I need this knowledge to survive in the future. If my job were to call me back I would go back, but I would not stop going to school. If it happens again, I will be ready to look for a new job in a new field, and, hopefully, it will be a secure one.

A Profile:

Students were asked to objectively portray an intriguing person, place, or event.

From the Other Side of the Counter

by Luke Edmunds

Having an inside point of view on a particular subject is a crucial factor for a successful observation. When you're observing a particular individual, or even an object or event for that matter, you must always be aware of the most detailed movement and action to have a good description of what's actually taking place. Placing yourself in the shoes of the watched is part of the whole process of seeing their point of view. This is why when I went to investigate the workings of my job of the three previous years, I was observing things not only with the eyes of a virgin analyst but also with the eyes of a three-year veteran.

I was visiting my friend, Matt, at Pizza Express in Groveland when my old boss Greg came outside and asked me to give him a hand moving a dough mixer. After we finished moving the dough mixer outside, he told me lunch was on him.

While I was sitting on a wooden stool eating my small meatball sub smothered in cheese, I looked up and realized the circus that surrounded me. The phones were ringing off the hook, the delivery people were racing in and out of the kitchen, and my old boss Greg was perspiring vigorously over hot ovens and grills. This was when I knew that this would be the ultimate subject to analyze.

Although I had worked in the establishment for over three years, I'd never seen what it was like from the other side of the warm greasy counter. I instantly grabbed a pencil and a book of sales slips so I could keep notes on the observation. I couldn't believe the difference in tension. When you're on the other side of the counter, it's a whole new ball game. I suddenly realized that every one was tense and running around screaming and yelling.

"Hey Greg, the lady from apartment C-112 says it's been an hour and her pizza still hasn't arrived," says my friend Bill on the phone.

I looked at Greg and realized all the different things he was dealing with. There were several different people speaking to him at once. Matt was telling him that he needed a steak and cheese with a large fry on the side, while Bill was asking him if he had change for a fifty. Not only was each person dealing with more than one problem, but they also had the pressure of the eat-in customers.

It was really amazing the way that Greg, Matt and Bill were able to talk to so many different people at once. While Matt was at the register making change for the bearded man in front of him, he was also taking an order from the stranger on the phone, while he exchanged grimaces with Greg. Bill was busy making excuses for the cold pizza on Balch Ave. that was delivered over an hour late. While Matt and Bill talked vigorously, Greg was busy dashing back and forth from oven to grill and freezer to fryer. I couldn't understand how any of them could possibly even hear themselves think. The phones continued to ring while the muffled stereo was begging to be heard in the background.

When I realized all the stress that the three of them had to deal with, I was really glad that I was no longer working there. I never noticed the tension involved while I was actually on the job. While I sat there and watched three of my friends get more irritable, I also observed the dominance of the outsider.

"I said I only wanted a little mayo on this," blurts an upset teenage girl. When I saw the reaction to the statement on Matt's face I knew he wasn't happy. Matt replied by telling the girl that she never mentioned the word "little" until just now.

Greg immediately turned to Matt with a look of frustration on his face and said "Matt, if the girl wants a new sub, then you make her a new sub."

As I sat there and listened to the conversation, I could tell that every one was on the same side. I knew they all wanted to tell some of the customers where to go.

As the rush hour slowly began to wane, I could begin to see the tension leave the wired bodies in the room. Greg, the twenty year pizza veteran, poured himself a cup of hot fresh roasted coffee while Matt, Bill and myself cracked a cold can of soda. I could see the individual drips of sweat forming on each of their foreheads. The kitchen must have been a good 85 degrees and the heat coming off the grill and ovens didn't help. As they looked up at each other they all let out this huge sigh of relief that sounded like a snoring elephant.

The one word that would come closest to fitting the description of the pizza business would be **pressure**. After observing my three friends in action, I can understand all the different stress factors that are involved in a fast food service. Not only are you dealing with the pressure of all the customers, but you also have an abundance of other things to worry about. The job requires you to not only prepare the food, but to also keep track of the inventory. I was so amazed by all the stress involved that I had forgotten why I'd quit the job in the first place.

When most customers are watching the people that are involved in their food preparation, they are watching with the eyes of the hungry, rather than the eyes of a stranger. Although I was not a stranger to the other side of the counter, all the actions that took place were still new to me. When I worked at Pizza Express, I'd always been a part of the action that was taking place day to day. This is why when I'd witnessed all the fast paced, multiple stress that was involved in the job, I was truly amazed. I was always so busy on the job that I never really got a chance to watch what was taking place around me. I truly believe that having a different perspective on a familiar situation is the key factor to a successful observation.

A Glow in the Sky

by Donna Evers

As I gazed around my neighborhood, I was amazed at the abundance of abandoned buildings that have been run down and neglected for so long, that parts of the city are beginning to resemble a ghost town. Many of the buildings have been forgotten by their owners and left unattended or unwanted by showing signs of neglect with broken windows, missing doors, paint chipping off the buildings, and garbage strewn in the yards. All around are signs of these run down dwellings, easily accessible to many of the forgotten people who no longer fit into society with their addictions.

I wonder how safe it will be for many who are living next to these dilapidated buildings. How safe do they feel at night when they are going to sleep? Do they think a fire will strike at any time next to them? How do they deal with the ugly sight of them? What goes through their mind when they see a different house go up in flames in their neighborhood? Are they a prisoner trapped inside their "castle," afraid to go out too far or for too long, for fear of returning home to a pile of ashes? We should all stop, think about solutions, and overcome the mass of abandoned buildings that are overtaking our society.

I won't forget that moment for as long as I live. The day had started so simply as an ordinarily lazy hot and humid July day. As the day turned into the night, it was cooler and more comfortable. A lot of my neighbors were outside on their front porches, indulged in heavy conversation and enjoying the cooling off of the heated day. Laughing and talking were the sounds to be heard before I drifted off to sleep on the comfortably worn loveseat. Hearing the sounds of the television, I quickly sat up and said the familiar words around 11:30 pm of "Good Night" and "See you in the morning" to my husband Steve who was mesmerized by the war film on television.

I dragged myself to bed and not long after my head hit the fluffy white pillow and my dreams were about to take over, a piercing scream sent chills up and down my spine making me realize I was no longer sleeping. As I sat up, rubbing my eyes my husband quickly rushed into the bedroom, and said "Honey, you better get up, the house is on fire across the street."

As I tried to come to my senses, I noticed the clock on my headboard with its red illuminating numbers showing that it was 1:15 am. The sudden reality came over me that we could be in real danger.

I raised the window shades of my front bedroom so my family and I could see the commotion. We had front row seats on the full size bed. Firemen were frantically unrolling their long white water hoses to the yellow fire hydrants. The shiny red and white fire trucks were lined up by Frontline Ambulance on Oxford Street and around the corner on Lowell Street. The policemen in their tired looking dark blue uniforms had an expression of disgust on their faces as they were trying to keep the inquisitive onlookers from getting in the way of the busily working firemen. They shook their heads as the crowd continued to move in the way.

The brown abandoned three decker that had stood lonely for so long was just an orange and red ball of flame lashing out at the firefighters and curious spectators that were filling up the sidewalks and the streets to watch the towering inferno.

We were unable to see all the trucks but knew that water spraying to the front of the burning house was from the stretched out hoses connected to some of the water pumps. As the firemen were wetting down the burning house, an enormous cloud of gray and white smoke had made seeing anything just a fog. The wind suddenly shifted the smoke towards the front of the burning building making me run around my apartment on the second floor yelling, "Hurry up, close all the windows before the smell overtakes us all."

After they were closed, Steve and I returned to the front room where once again the flames were dancing across the roof of the house like a ballerina gliding across a stage. Seeing this, I exclaimed to my daughter, Danielle, "Stay away from the windows, I can feel the heat of the flames, just like a hot oven."

Mr. Pinet, a neighbor across the street from us, was wetting down house and garage roofs of his own and of his neighbors on either side with a green garden hose. The glowing embers were free-falling all over their property from the force of the wind.

The sound of screeching sirens and the arrival of more fire trucks made it known that it was a fire out of control. Just like a two year old throwing a temper tantrum, it too had a mind of its own.

The firemen with their quick actions and training kept fighting the fire, to stop it from spreading to the occupied homes to the right and to the back of the raging building. Two bright lights started to rise from the rear of the building through the fog-like smoke staring out and for a moment it seemed to be a UFO but it was actually the new bright red fire truck that is worth millions wetting down the house with a fan-like

spray.

"I knew it would go up, I am surprised that it didn't go up sooner," I casually said to Steve, who replied "You know that was arson; it had to be set."

"One less to worry about," I replied back.

As I listened to my daughter say "Fire" and "Hot" I suddenly realized that it was a little too close to home. I am hoping that it never happens to anyone that I know. The fire is so destructive, taking out buildings and personal belongings to the occupants or those that are nearby.

I was relieved as the exhausted firemen had the blaze under restraint in two and a half hours time. The three decker house that towered over everyone was just an empty shell left standing across the street. The roof was completely gone along with the right wall. Two of the three porches on the front of the house were all that remained with the left wall. The dwelling was reduced to a pile of rubble and gray ashes. There were broken windows and shards of glass strewn all over the sidewalks and the muddy yard. Twisted aluminum piled on the ground which were once part of the window frames looked like abstract pieces of art. Charred fragments of wood which were once part of the houses were in driveways and obstructing the way by the curbs.

Everyone had been put out tonight for one reason or another-physically or mentally due to the growing concern of the uninhabited buildings.

After the smoke had cleared up there were a total of three unoccupied houses that were lost to the fire. The brown three decker, a white single family house located behind and to the right a yellow single family home. Six houses that were occupied were also damaged by the "Glow in the Sky" and its flying embers.

I exclaimed, "It's time for bed, it's all over." We all started to pull down the front shades and get ready to try and get some well needed sleep. "Good Night, Danielle," I said, as my husband tucked her in bed. As I climbed back into my bed and under the comfort of my warm blankets, I said, "That was too close and scary. Did you feel the heat from those flames, and we were inside the house?"

Yes", Steve answered back. "Maybe now we can get back to sleep."

I asked, "What time is it?"

"Four A.M." was his response.

Whenever I pass by a vacant unboarded rundown building, I often wonder if it will be the next one to be overtaken by the malicious act of some criminal who gets a kick out of lighting fires for fun or for money. What thoughts will run through someone else's mind as the raging fire takes over their

neighborhood which is awakened by the screeching sirens and the chatter of the curious onlookers and homeowners protecting what is theirs.

It is a hard fact that when you wake up or go to sleep, you never know if your life will be sent into a turmoil over another rash of arson fires in your neighborhood.

PRIDE

by Bruce Taylor

Have you ever worked with the physically disabled? In this essay I hope to reveal the personal feelings I had when I helped the physically disabled at Bretton Woods Ski Area last year.

It all started two years ago when I was privileged to teach a group from Highwatch Rehabilitation Center, is a place for people who were involved in accidents in which severe brain injury occurred. I was selected to take a group of 12 people out for a trial period, to decide if the students were interested in the sport of skiing.

As a ski instructor, I can say that the lesson was an experience I will never forget. I had no experience at all in teaching the disabled prior to this lesson. There were so many different techniques I had to develop myself to simplify even the simplest steps, all which eventually helped the students.

The first three times we met for lessons resulted in nothing but sheer confusion. You know how it is: missing equipment, missing students, etc.... After all the confusion, though, everything began to come together.

Towards the middle of the season, the students had learned many of the essential skills needed to make it down a race course. Almost everyone had practiced enough to experience the freedom and fun that happens when you ski. Often times I would find myself very excited for my students, because they really applied themselves individually and accomplished more than they ever imagined they would. I personally was moved by their motivation to learn.

Near the end of the season, I was asked by the director of the program to assist in the ski race at Bretton Woods that the students were invited to. I took no hesitation in accepting the invitation. On race day, the students and I had a "pep talk," to help comfort them as well as reiterate what they had learned from the lessons. I offered advice to the students concerning the race.

"Never watch the gates as you pass them," I said. "Always look ahead to the next one. This will keep you from slowing down, and, whatever you do," I added, "Do Not look back!" (I knew that I had a few students who possessed that very habit.) The advice got them all psyched up for the race. We talked about all they had learned throughout the season. All of my students remembered every last step I had painstakingly demonstrated to

them. I explained to them all that they had reached a high level of achievement. I had to think back and remind the students that when they first started they really didn't care much for the sport. I had to tell them all the techniques they have learned, and how they all had learned them individually, each having their own distinct "trials and tribulations" of learning. I told them all they had really impressed me, and that I felt they would conquer the race course with ease. After the little pep talk, the students were joking around and having fun remembering what they had all put me through three months earlier.

After the fun subsided, the students were all still very nervous, and some were even scared. Some didn't even want to leave the lodge, too embarrassed, thinking they were automatically going to lose because they were not good enough. I explained to those who were scared that if they were invited up here, then they were good enough to race. I also told them that I took the responsibility of developing and training them so they could compete in races such as this.

After a half hour of negotiating, my students were all ready to go. I tried placing them in their designated groups, which was no easy task. Trying to find all my students in a swarm of people of like disabilities, is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. When I finally retrieved all of my students, I directed them into their group and comforted them until it was their turn to race.

The outcome of the event was excellent. All of my students placed in the top four in their individual categories. Three of them placed first. I felt numb when the awards were being handed out. Trying to keep myself in order, I gathered my group after they received their awards and I told them I would never have believed that I could develop such a relationship with the disabled. It opened my eyes and made me aware that their disabilities are really small barriers they have to overcome with the help of others, like we did together.

I will never forget that experience. I took a group, developed their skills in a sport they had no ambition to learn about, and at the same time, developed my skills as an instructor. I had the best time of my life with my students. They all gave me a great sense of pride, believing in as well as making winners out of them.

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

Peter Barnum, 18, is a full-time student and dairy farmer. He is currently majoring in general studies, and hopes to eventually transfer to UNH for a bachelor's degree in Farm Management. When not delivering calves, he enjoys dirt bike riding and "hanging out." Of writing, he says that "through his instructor (Barbara Stachniewicz) and the wonderful help of the Writing Center, I learned to write quite well." He lives in Salisbury.

Paul Cain, 31, is a Respiratory Care major who hopes to pursue a career in pediatrics. "I enjoyed retelling the story of the birth of my first child," he writes, although he'd "rather be reading than writing." He lives with his wife and four boys in Newbury.

When **Tom Castine** found himself laid-off from his job, he found a novel way to cope with his feelings of frustration: he wrote an award-winning essay for his Basic Writing class! Tom, one of Vicky Frankel's students, is enrolled in the Personal Computer certificate program, and says that the Basic Writing experience has helped him to enjoy writing. He lives in Danville, NH with his wife and two children.

Tara DiPietro, 18, of Haverhill, is a Liberal Arts major. Before this semester, Tara writes that she "loved to write, but was not sure how to format her work." Now, she feels confident in her writing abilities. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career as a fashion designer.

Shaun Durkin, a 27 year old Liberal Arts major from Lawrence, writes that prior to enrolling in BW, he "hated writing, mostly because I didn't feel I had the skills to. But, with the help and patience of Diane (Gori) and Writing Center, I now feel more confident." In his leisure time, Shaun is busy inspiring and helping others as a football coach.

"I truly believe [Basic Writing] changed my opinion of writing drastically," writes **Luke Edmunds**. "I`ve not only improved my skills, but now I enjoy it!" A Liberal Arts major from Groveland, Luke enjoys acting, working out and skiing. He is 19.

Donna M. Evers is an office technology major from Lawrence. A student in Joanna Fortna's BW class, she writes that she began the semester as someone who had mixed feelings about writing, but says that "now I enjoy it." She lives in Lawrence with her husband and three children.

Cheryl Garafolo is a part-time student. She was a student in Faith Benedetti's Basic Writing class. She lives in Lawrence with her husband and children.

Christopher Gaudet, 21, of Lawrence, believes that Basic Writing "helped him to explore the many possibilities of my person," and credits his instructor Joanna Fortna and writing tutor Eileen Jenne as inspirational. A biology major, Chris is very interested in environmental issues and hopes to work as a biological field researcher.

Ally Green is a Liberal Arts major from Haverhill. About her narrative, Ally writes that "the piece I submitted took place at a very young time in my life. I joined the army for all the wrong reasons, and it left my whole outlook on my life changed. I really found out what kind of stuff I was made of." Indeed, writing this semester has helped her to discover this as well. "(Before) I liked to write, but lacked confidence and basic writing know-how ... I found out I can write a halfway decent paper." She credits her instructor, Diane Gori, with coaching and inspiring her.

Kevin Harrington is a Liberal Arts major from Pelham, N.H.. When he is not writing about the abandoned mills of Lowell, Mass., he enjoys cooking, rock climbing and tennis. He is 19.

A Liberal Arts major from Lowell, **Mary Hogan** writes that before BW, she hated writing, but credits her instructor Joanna Fortna with helping to change her attitude. She hopes to enroll in an R.N. program. In her free time, she enjoys all sports, but says that "being a mother is my greatest hobby." She has two children.

Jill Johnson is a 19 year-old Liberal Arts major from Windham, N.H.. While her long range goals include a degree in zoology and eventually working as a dolphin trainer, Jill writes that "spending the semester in BW increased my writing confidence and made me realize that I do have the ability to write well."

Craig Lambert, 26, is a driven man. When not earning a living as an EMT (which provided fodder for his poignant narrative), working as a freelance electrician, or pounding the pavement as an auxiliary police officer, Craig is working full-time toward a degree in Engineering Science. He lives in Haverhill and was a student in Faith Benedetti's BW class.

A Liberal Arts major from Lowell, **Rhonda Martin** hopes to pursue a career as a registered nurse. She credits her instructor, Carol Barron, and the Writing Center staff for helping her to enjoy writing more. A mother of two children, Rhonda enjoys working on craft projects, and is currently building doll houses.

Sheri Martino, 18, of Haverhill is credits her instructor, Carol Barron, with making her BW class both fun and educational. An accounting major who enjoys playing softball and basketball in her spare time says that she "hated the thought of writing" at the beginning of the semester. By the end, she discovered "that it wasn't so bad ... (having) fun and learning all in one."

Catherine Mendieta, Lawrence, is working towards a degree in Nursing, and hopes to one day work as pediatric nurse. She writes that BW helped her to open up and to explore a creative side of herself. She enjoys spending time with her one year old son, Daniel.

Marjorie Poore, 27, is a Commercial Art major who hopes one day to be a "reknowned animator and author." She writes that prior to the Fall semester, she "somewhat enjoyed writing, but was not able to release all I had to give from inside me," and credits her newfound confidence to the Basic Writing course and Carol Barron. She lives in Epping, N.H. with her children.

Pamela Rousseau is a part-time student from Methuen. She is the mother of one, and hopes to pursue a career in writing.

"Writing is a difficult task for me," says **Mayra Santana**, "but my instructor (Joanna Fortna) made it easier for me by encouraging me." A Criminal Justice major from Lawrence, Mayra is active in NECC student organizations and enjoys dancing. She is the mother of three.

When not working, taking classes or caring for his three children, **Kurt Stephan**, 28, plays drums in a rock and roll band. He is currently majoring in Liberal Arts, but hopes to enroll in the Radiologic Tech program. His thoughtful narrative focuses on his tour of duty aboard an aircraft carrier stationed in the Persian Gulf. He lives in Merrimac.

Michael Tardif, aka Mr. Romance, 26, is a Methuen native majoring in Liberal Arts. A student in Chris Fauske's BW section, Mike says that he has found writing about his thoughts and life experiences to be really interesting. After Northern Essex, he hopes to pursue a career as a Physical Therapist.

Bruce Taylor, 22, is a Physical Education major. A ski and snowboard instructor, Bruce enjoys working with children and young adults. He writes that "before this semester, I hated writing with a passion." He lives in Freedom, N.H..

"I HATED writing...," says **Colleen White** when asked how she felt at the beginning of the semester in Dianne Palter-Gill's BW section. An eighteen year-old Liberal Arts major from Merrimac, Colleen says that her narrative illustrates that "even though you don't have money, Christmas can still be a great holiday."

Anonymous is a 20 year-old Business Transfer major from Haverhill who hopes to pursue a career in sales, and says that "I enjoy writing now, and love being a student at NECC."